



NINA CLARE
THE JANE AUSTEN FAIRY TALES

Beloved

A RETELLING OF NORTHANGER ABBEY

BELOVED

A FAIRY TALE RETELLING OF NORTHANGER ABBEY



NINA CLARE

LOST&FOUNDSTORIES


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Artwork by Florence Harrison

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Also by Nina Clare

A FAITHFUL LOVE



‘Can you see him, Alice?’

Alice scrunched up her short-sighted eyes. ‘Hard to tell, milady. They look all alike to me.’

‘But, no,’ insisted her young mistress, ‘they do not look all alike. His horse is a dappled grey, and he wears a very distinctive helmet – his has a crest in the shape of a falcon on it.’

Alice leaned over the stone balustrade and peered harder. ‘There’s more than one grey horse, milady, and they’re too far away for me to make out any falcon.’

‘He sits the most elegantly,’ said her mistress. ‘He sits the tallest, he looks the most noblest by far – surely you must be able to tell him apart?’

‘Come and look for yourself, milady.’

Lady Eleanor finished dressing herself, having sent Alice away to the window at the first sound of the bugle. She hurried to her maid’s side and leaned forward to look out at the landscape below. A line of eight horsemen were wending their way up the hill towards the castle; the wintry morning light glinted softly on their armour and mail. The knight at the rear held aloft a fluttering banner with the earl’s symbol of two crossed swords upon it.

‘There he is!’ cried Lady Eleanor jubilantly. ‘Third from the rear – how can you say they all look alike? He is by far the tallest in the saddle. Look at his upright carriage. See how well he holds his spear? They must have ridden through the night to come so early.’

Alice shrugged. ‘I suppose I’d best go down and see that the victuals are made ready for your father,’ she suggested.

‘Oh, yes, do!’ urged Lady Eleanor. ‘You know how irascible he is if there’s no meal made ready the moment he comes in. But after you must–’

‘–But after I must go and see if there’s any word for you,’ said Alice, turning away from the balcony into her mistress’s chamber. ‘Where’s your letter?’

Lady Eleanor pulled a tightly folded letter from inside her long sleeve, and Alice took it and tucked it out of sight inside her bodice. ‘Thank you, Alice. What would I do without you?’

Alice grunted in reply and left the chamber.

THE SHORT, stalwart figure of Alice made her appearance in the kitchen to shout above the clatter of pans and the loud chatter of the kitchen staff that the master had returned. She was very satisfied with the looks of fear and the increase of bustle that her words aroused. Next she hurried outside, pulling her shawl more tightly about her as the wintry wind seared through her woollen gown. The knights had dismounted in the courtyard near the stables, and were making their way to the armoury hall, the young pageboys hurrying after them to bear away their lances and helmets. One of the knights seemed to linger behind, looking for someone. Alice stuck her head out from behind a buttress wall to signal her presence; he saw her and spoke to his page, a boy of seven or eight, who ran to Alice, took the letter she held out to him, thrust a letter of his own into her hand and ran back to his

master. Alice looked around to see that no one had witnessed them, and then hurried away.

LADY ELEANOR WAS SEATED in the great hall with her father and brothers. She was relieved to see her maid appear safely, and turned back to serving her father his beer. She could not resist casting glances at the trestle table where her father's men-at-arms sat eating, and was rewarded with a smiling glance in return from the tall, young man near the middle of the table.

‘Have you been well in our absence, Eleanor?’ said her brother who was seated closest to her.

‘I have, thank you, Henry,’ she replied. ‘Though very quiet. Too quiet. The wind and rain have confined me, and there was no kind brother to read to me to while away the long hours.’ She smiled at him. ‘I am glad you are all safely returned. Were you satisfied with your venture, my lord?’ she said to her father.

Her father did not look up from his roast mutton and bread. ‘What’s it to you?’ he said brusquely. ‘Think on your sewing and reading, and not on what’s no business of yours.’

Eleanor dropped her head and said no more.

‘This meat’s as tough as leather,’ growled her father. ‘You!’ he barked at a waiting boy. ‘More meat – and tell the cook if he sends up any more of this horse flesh I’ll have *him* put on a spit!’

Eleanor’s eldest brother, Frederick, rolled his eyes at his father’s ill humour.

‘HAVE YOU?’ said Lady Eleanor eagerly, when she was alone again with her maid.

‘I have.’ She held out the letter. Lady Eleanor snatched it up, broke the seal and read.

Alice watched the smile spreading across her mistress’s face as she read her letter, and shook her head at the folly of young love.

But Eleanor’s smile faded as she read on, and she clasped the letter to her heart when she had finished and gave an exclamation of dismay. ‘He is going to speak to my father,’ she said. ‘He will not let me risk my reputation by this secret correspondence. He wishes all things to be honourable; he says that I deserve nothing less. He is going to ask openly for my hand.’

Alice nodded approvingly. She did not enjoy the risks she undertook in her part in the lovers’ secret communications.

‘But what if my father denies him?’ said Lady Eleanor. ‘What then?’ she sank down onto a settle as though she contemplated something so dreadful that she had not the strength to stand.

‘He’s your father’s best knight,’ said Alice. ‘Him saving your brother’s life that time should go in his favour. He’s known as a good young man, not given to drinking and carousing. He’s a good chance of winning your hand, I’d say.’

‘But he’s not very rich,’ said Lady Eleanor. ‘And my father places much value on wealth.’

Alice could think of nothing to say to counter this, for she knew it was the truth.

‘Bring me my writing box,’ Lady Eleanor said. ‘I will write my reply.’

NEXT MORNING ALICE braved the thick mist and cold mizzle and hurried to the usual place. She peeked behind the wall; she could see one of the stable hands crossing the yard, but neither Sir Vallentyne nor his young page was to be seen. She wrapped her hands inside her shawl and walked back and forth a few paces to keep a little warmer. He’d better hurry, she

was not going to wait long in such weather. She heard someone's footsteps, and peeked round the wall to see the figure of a tall, heavy-cloaked man striding through the mist.

'About time,' she grumbled, and held out her mistress's letter as he drew near.

There was a hesitant pause, and she looked up at him, wondering what his reluctance was. She gasped as she saw that the young man's face beneath the hood was not that of Sir Vallentyne.

'For me?' said the drawling voice of Sir Frederick, the earl's eldest son.

'No!' she cried, but it was too late. Sir Frederick had plucked the letter from her hand.

'My sister's handwriting,' said Sir Frederick, looking at the missive. 'To whom could my sister be sending secret letters?'

'Oh, my lord – I do beg you! Have mercy and give it back!'

Sir Frederick sneered at her and turned away with a swish of his long cape and disappeared back into the swirling mist.

LADY ELEANOR PACED up and down her chamber wringing her hands. Alice was sobbing softly over her darning work.

'It's not your fault, Alice,' Lady Eleanor said for the fifth time that hour. 'I won't see you punished. You acted on my orders.'

The chamber door flew open and Lady Eleanor spun round to face it, knowing too well who would be there.

Her father held the letter in his hand. Lady Eleanor paled and tried hard not to tremble.

'You are a disgrace to my house,' said her father in his steely voice.

Lady Eleanor's voice was quivering as she spoke. 'Please, my lord. He was to ask you for my hand. He was to ask honourably.'

‘Honourably?’ her father spat the word. ‘A penniless knight aspiring to the hand of my daughter? There’s no honour in impudence and vanity and presumption!’

‘Please...’ Eleanor whispered, ‘I love him...’

‘You will never see him again.’

‘No – please – I beg–’

‘Silence! You will not leave this castle unless you are under the escort of myself or your brothers. Your maid will leave my sight this very day, as will that presumptuous dog! *I* will determine who you marry – and you will be subject to *my* will until that day comes!’

ALICE and her mistress clung to one another as they said their farewells, and then Alice hurried away. Lady Eleanor stood at her window, too distressed to realise she was shivering from the cold. She stood watching her maid, and only companion, as she trudged away down the hill from the castle. Worse was to follow, as she then endured the sight of her beloved Sir Vallentyne also riding away in his banishment, his horse hooves clattering over the wooden bridge and down the path that took him from her forever.

It was Dorothy, the old housekeeper, who found her slumped on the stone floor beneath the window and called for help to lift her onto her bed. Lady Eleanor awoke to the old servant chafing her ice cold hands and feet, while calling for more wood to build up the fire. The young boy who carried in a basket of wood lingered at the fireplace, stacking the wood slowly. When the housekeeper left the chamber to fetch hot broth, he darted to the bed and threw something onto the bed cushion.

Lady Eleanor sat up, her hands trembling, her heart beating. It was from him – he had managed to send one last letter to her! The writing was scrawled, as though he had written in great haste, or under great distress.

Beloved,

I am going into the far northern kingdom where the king is offering great reward to any man who slays the dragon that terrorises the land. When I have made my fortune I will return for you.

*Yours eternally,
Riche Vallentyne.*

ADVENTURE



‘The man in the black hood snatched Lady Rosamunda up, clamping a rough hand over her mouth to stifle her screams. In vain she struggled as she was lifted onto an enormous, black horse and gripped tightly by an unrelenting arm – and as she looked up at the shadowy face of the man who held her – who should she find herself looking at, but Baron Blackcrow, who let out a wicked laugh as he cracked his whip and drove his horse on at breakneck speed, taking her far, far away!’

Catherine paused for effect, and her six younger siblings sat transfixed with widened eyes.

‘What happened next?’ gasped eight-year-old Anne. ‘Did Sir Rollande rescue her?’

‘How can he?’ said ten year old Tom, ‘he’s chained up in the dungeon, remember?’

‘Catherine!’ called a matronly voice. The children groaned, knowing that their story was suspended for now.

‘There you all are,’ said Mistress Morland coming into the room. ‘I wondered why the house was so quiet.’

‘Oh, Mama, don’t take Catherine away just yet!’ protested twelve year old Mary. ‘Lady Rosamunda has just been kidnapped by the evil Baron

Blackcrow, and Sir Rollande is chained up in the giant's dungeon, and the red dragon is burning up the houses and—'

'For shame, Catherine,' chided Mistress Morland mildly. 'I said to teach the little ones edifying stories. Harriet will be having nightmares again.'

'I won't, Mama,' promised four-year-old Harriet. 'I like Catherine's stories!'

Mistress Morland tutted her disapproval. 'Lady Allen will be expecting you,' she told her eldest daughter. 'Run along to the manor now, she is wanting your assistance with the trimmings on her new cape.'

Catherine obediently got up to get her cloak.

'Be sure to wear your pattens,' her mother urged. 'The path is very muddy after all the rain.'

'Will you tell us later what happens to Lady Rosamunda?' Anne whispered as Catherine passed by.

Catherine nodded discreetly and ruffled her sister's curls.

CATHERINE DID NOT HURRY to the manor house, for she enjoyed being outside; the mud and mizzle did not worry her. A songbird was also braving the rain and trilling a tune from the middle of a mulberry bush. Catherine passed it by and looked up at the familiar half-timbered walls of the manor house as they emerged from behind the yew trees. She was a daily visitor to the manor, so she did not knock, but let herself into the hall, leaving her wooden pattens on the stone step.

'There you are,' called a middle-aged lady sitting amid a mountain of ribbons and lace. 'Come and wind up these ribbons, my dear, I do declare I cannot find a good match for my new scarlet velvet cape, I do believe I shall have to travel into the city a full day early that I might get it trimmed there, for there is no more of anything to be had in the village until the next merchant visit.'

‘So you shall leave for Kingston this week?’ said Catherine, disentangling a long length of blue silk from the mound that flowed from Lady Allen.

‘Indeed I shall. For I shall not be easy until I have this cape made ready.’

‘I shall miss you,’ said Catherine. ‘It will be spring when you return.’

‘Bless you, child,’ said Lady Allen, touched at the thought of being missed. A sudden thought seem to strike her; she lowered the length of lace she was examining to look at Catherine who sat on a stool near her feet. ‘How old are you now, my dear?’ said Lady Allen thoughtfully.

‘Seventeen, ma’am.’

‘Hmm. A young lady. It would be a fine thing for you to go to Kingston, I declare you are quite of the right age.’

‘Me, go to Kingston?’ Catherine looked up from her ribbon winding. ‘Mama and Papa never go to the city.’

Lady Allen leaned forward and patted Catherine on the knee, ‘You may come with me. What do you say to that? Is that not a fine idea? It will be such a nice thing for me to have someone to talk to other than Lord Allen.’

‘Me – go to Kingston?’ Catherine repeated.

‘Tell your mother we will leave two days hence. I am sure she will not object.’

‘I’m sure she won’t,’ said Catherine, a feeling of excitement bubbling up inside her. Her face fell. ‘But I don’t have anything to wear.’ She looked down at her simple gown and apron and thought of all the finely dressed lords and ladies that danced at the royal ballrooms in the city.

Lady Allen waved a dismissive hand. ‘We will get you a new gown or two in Kingston. Wait till you see all the cloth merchant’s houses – a whole row of them – it is quite a sight!’

MASTER AND MISTRESS MORLAND did not object to their eldest daughter going into the royal city with their venerable neighbours. Mistress Morland did not quite agree with Lady Allen's discreet hint that Catherine was of the right age to meet a future husband, and the courtly balls were the very best way for such encounters, for Mistress Morland thought Catherine too young for marriage as yet; perhaps in a year or two. But she did agree it would be a fine thing for Catherine to see a little of life beyond the village she had spent every day of her seventeen years in. It was never a bad thing for young people to learn how to show manners in a new situation and see a little of the world. And so Catherine borrowed a trunk from Lady Allen, for her parents did not own such a superfluous thing as a spare travelling trunk, and excitedly began to pack. She had not much to put in her trunk, for she had only one good gown; she would wear her second best gown for travelling in, but her everyday gown was not fit to take.

'I MIGHT SEE YOU IN KINGSTON,' her eldest brother told her at breakfast on the day of her departure. 'I shall be passing through for a week or two when I have a break from my studies.'

'That will be nice, James,' said Catherine.

'I wish *I* could go to the city,' sighed sixteen-year-old Sally.

'I hope that is not an air of discontent I hear,' said her mother briskly. 'I certainly cannot spare both of you. Someone must help me with the younger ones.'

Catherine felt someone tugging on her sleeve and looked down at her sister Anne. 'What about Lady Rosamunda and Sir Rollande?' asked Anne in a small voice.

'For shame, Anne,' said her mother. 'I don't want your head so full of stories that you can think of nothing useful.'

‘I’ll write it down when I’m away, and read it to you when I come back,’ Catherine whispered to Anne when her mother had turned away to attend to little Harriet.

‘Will you meet the king and queen in Kingston?’ said Mary.

‘Not likely,’ James answered. ‘Catherine might see them passing by, but they don’t show themselves much. At least, not to the likes of us.’

‘Are there dragons?’ said George eagerly.

‘There are no dragons this far south,’ said his mother. ‘And no giants this far north. Catherine will be perfectly safe in the middle of the kingdom. She will not be mixing with grand personages, to be sure, but she will be very respectable with Lord and Lady Allen. She will be both safe *and* respectable, and nothing out of the ordinary will happen beyond a few nice balls.’

And so Catherine was waved away by her sizeable gathering of siblings. Her father had given her a little purse of coin for her necessary purchases, and her mother had lent her her very own fur-trimmed cloak, which was not in the fashionable style, but was very warm. ‘Be sure to wear it when you venture out,’ she instructed. ‘You don’t want to spoil your stay by catching cold. And when in conversation, remember not to gush as you are wont to do when excited.’

CATHERINE OF MORLAND COTTAGE arrived in Kingston, regarding the tedium of the long journey, the frustration of a horse having thrown a shoe on two occasions, and the exceedingly poor fare they had been subjected to at the inns they had supped at, as being of no account in comparison to the adventure of actually being in the royal city!

Lord Allen bemoaned his bones being shaken out of joint by the jostle of the ride, and Lady Allen lamented that the kirtle of her riding gown had not borne up well from the crushing and creasing it had been subjected to.

Meanwhile their young companion was eagerly clambering down from her mount and looking about her, and seeing something of interest across the road, she had to be yanked back by her hood by Lord Allen's valet, to keep her from being trampled underfoot by a galloping horseman with a flying cape.

'Have a care, Miss Morland,' urged the valet. 'The streets are full of breaknecks. You're not among the country lanes now.'

'Come inside, dear,' called Lady Allen, disappearing through the open door of a grand looking house. 'Take care underfoot, for the streets are quite horrid, don't step in anything nasty, nor let your hem trail.'

LADY ALLEN WAS MOST diligent in procuring her young charge suitable new clothing, and had her own lady to dress Catherine's hair. Catherine was amazed at how different she felt in her first fashionable gown with her hair braided and curled in the royal style. She even had her first pair of kid slippers upon her feet, with a little wooden heel that softly clacked upon the flagstone floors. She felt like a real lady, a sensation that had never come upon her before.

'Oh, to be young and pretty!' said Lady Allen with pleasure as she examined the effects of her transformative work. Catherine glowed with as much pleasure as Lady Allen at hearing herself called pretty; no one had ever called her pretty before.

'Are we ready?' enquired Lord Allen, looking very uncomfortable in his new clothes. 'These britches are woefully tight,' he complained.

'They are just the thing,' his wife assured him. 'It is what all the men are wearing at court.'

'*Must* I wear this ridiculous feather?' complained Lord Allen.

'Indeed you must!' cried his wife. 'All the men at court are wearing feathers in their cap – the bigger the better! The king wears a griffin feather,

but they are near priceless. If I could have found you a northern eagle feather I would, but there were none to be had, so I had to make do with a spotted hawk instead.’ She sighed at this disappointment.

And so the party made their fashionable way to the sedan chairs in which they were to be borne off to the ballroom of the outer court.

CATHERINE KNEW there would be elegance, beauty, grace and all that was delightful and romantic in the royal ballroom. To be sure there would not be the opulence and splendour that one would find in the ballroom of the inner royal court, one needed to be a duchess or a marchioness at least to advance to the inner court, but she was resigned to being a mere commoner in attendance upon the more nobly born Allens. The outer court ballroom was more than grand enough for her.

Once inside the ballroom she was a little perturbed to find that instead of elegance there was much cramming and elbowing, as everyone jostled for a space to sit. Sadly, it seemed there *was* no space left to sit, and as Catherine passed through the crowd of faces she was a little struck by the lack of expected beauty and grace, for it seemed to her that the room was mostly populated by oversized and overdressed middle-aged people.

‘Oh my stars!’ said Lady Allen, as they wrestled their way to a pair of just-vacated chairs. ‘What a crush! What a melee! I do believe my hem has been trod on three times!’

‘I do believe we have lost Lord Allen,’ said Catherine looking round for the stout figure of the said gentleman. ‘I know he came in with us, for I heard him call out to that young man who almost ran into us in the entrance hall.’

‘The very man who first trod on my gown!’

Catherine continued looking about the room for a spotted feather.

‘Do not be minding out for Lord Allen,’ said his wife. ‘He will be in the gaming chamber with all the other gentlemen who are not inclined to dance.’

‘I wish we could see the dancing,’ said Catherine, trying to peer through the throng of people who hindered her view of the ballroom floor. She gave up after some minutes, and had to content herself with either looking at Lady Allen, or looking at the back of a pair of coats of the two men who stood directly before her. She concluded a little despondently that never had a royal ballroom seemed less royal or less like a ballroom.

MATRIMONY & DANCING



The long, dark days of wintertide passed slowly for Lady Eleanor. Her brother Henry was now her only companion and friend, but he was often not at liberty to be with her in their father's castle, for he dwelt a full morning's ride away as lord of his own estate.

One gloomy February morning he found his sister sitting in her chamber, staring blankly at her embroidery work. She looked up at his entrance, and at the sight of him a flicker of happiness returned to her face.

'Henry, what a pleasure. I did not expect you this morning.' She rearranged a cushion on the settle so he could sit beside her.

'Father sent word for me to come.'

'Oh? There is no matter of concern, I hope?'

'He wants me to go to Kingston to arrange lodgings for us.'

'For you and father?'

'And for you.'

'Me? He is taking me to Kingston?'

Henry nodded. 'We'll leave shortly after I return. I hope to be gone less than a week.'

'Did Father say what the purpose of the visit is?'

Henry shifted awkwardly on the seat and bent down to pick up a skein of silk thread that had fallen to the floor.

‘Henry? Don’t hide it from me. I would rather know.’

‘I believe,’ said Henry, ‘that Father considers it is time for us to make our matches.’

Eleanor stared at him. ‘Us?’ she echoed.

‘Us. Both of us. He’s already got someone in mind for Frederick, but she won’t be of age till later this year. Now it’s our turn to be married off.’

Eleanor leaned back looking grieved.

‘I’m sorry Eleanor. I know this is a blow for you. I know how you feel about Vallentyne. I’m truly sorry.’

‘I knew this time would come,’ said Eleanor. ‘But I did not expect it so soon. I don’t know if I can bear it, Henry. Riche said he would return for me, if he succeeds in...’ Her voice trailed away. She did not like to speak of Sir Vallentyne’s quest. There was so little hope of him succeeding. No man ever had.

Henry leaned forward and took her hands and rubbed them as though to impart strength to her. ‘Come now, Eleanor. I’ll be at your side every moment. We may not even meet with anyone that Father considers a good match; you know how particular he is. Chances are we’ll have a pleasant time at the balls, and come home no closer to being wedded off than we are this day.’

Eleanor nodded to please him and to let him think that he was succeeding in comforting her. ‘It will a relief to be away from this castle and among people for a time,’ she said bravely. ‘I see no one to speak to but you now Alice is gone. Above all it will be a blessing to have you with me every day, for some weeks at least.’

‘And think of the dancing,’ said Henry. ‘I haven’t danced in an age.’

She smiled weakly. 'I do not share your passion for dancing, as you know. But I will take pleasure in seeing you charm all the pretty young ladies whom you choose to dance with.'



HENRY WAS SATISFIED that the lodgings he had arranged to rent from Lord Milsom for one month were suited to his father's taste; he would journey back to Tilney Castle the following morning. Now that his business was concluded, he would allow himself the pleasure of an evening at the royal ballroom.

'The gaming room is to the left, sir,' the Master of the Ceremonies advised, as Henry entered the pillared hall.

'I'm no gamester,' said Henry cheerfully, 'I'm here to dance.' He tapped his foot in time to the music he could hear drifting from the ballroom beyond.

'Would you care to be introduced to a partner, sir?' offered the Master.

'Indeed I would – but she must be young and pretty!'

'Very good, sir. Follow me.'

The Master of the Ceremonies made good use of his large, ceremonial staff to part a way through the throng of people. He stopped before the seat of a middle-aged lady with greying hair and a prodigious amount of tassels on her shawl and Henry was about to whisper into the Master's ear that he had specified a *young* lady, when the Master stepped aside to reveal a second person, who was both young and of pleasing appearance.

'My Lady of Allen, Miss Catherine of Morland, may I introduce to you Sir Henry of Tilney,' said the Master with a sweep of his golden staff. Sir Henry lifted his cap and bowed elegantly to the two ladies.

'Delighted to make your acquaintance,' said Sir Henry. 'Miss Morland, may I ask for the pleasure of your hand for the next dance?'

Miss Morland flushed very prettily and looked as delighted to join him as she said she was. She was a fair partner, light on her feet, and with such an open, happy countenance that he did not leave her after he had returned her to her companion, but accepted the invitation of sitting with her and Lady Allen and taking some refreshment. He dutifully made polite conversation with both ladies and quickly learnt that the way to the elder lady's heart was in complimenting her on her style of dress, but failed to discern the young lady's point of vanity. It seemed that as yet she had none that he could find out; she seemed unselfconscious of her looks and dress. She blushed often, but did not shy away from speaking to him. He tried teasing her, but she only smiled at him as though he were part amusement, part puzzle. He was so pleased with her that he proposed another dance before the close of the ball, and dance again they did.

He felt quite cheerful as he rode back to his lodgings at the inn that night. A new thought flickered at the edge of his mind: the thought that it was a pity he would never have the choosing of his own wife, but must be subject to his father's choice. A great pity. The realisation had never really struck him until now. But there was no use dwelling on it. It was how things were. All thoughts of a certain young face with a clear, light eye, an honest expression, and a charming smile must be firmly put out of his mind.

THE SWEETS OF FRIENDSHIP



‘Well that was a pleasing evening, was it not?’ said Lady Allen as they took their refreshment before bed. ‘A whole week we have been here, and I was near to despairing of you finding a partner at the dance, and tonight appears just such a man – and *what* a nice young man!’

Catherine nodded and smiled her agreement. He *was* a nice young man. Not too handsome as to make her feel uncomfortably plain, but pleasant looking, tall, good at dancing, a little curious in his teasing manner of talking, but she had three older brothers, so teasing did not trouble her, it was far better than flattery which would have troubled her greatly.

‘A whole week without a dance partner,’ exclaimed Lady Allen again, ‘but *what* a nice young man he was. He admired my headdress very well, did he not, Catherine?’

Catherine agreed that he did.

‘His cap feather was very modest, to be sure,’ said Lady Allen, with a hint of dissatisfaction, ‘but perhaps he is of very modest status.’

‘I took the trouble to enquire of him,’ said Lord Allen, his spotted hawk’s feather bouncing as he sat down near the fireplace.

‘And what did you learn?’ said Lady Allen eagerly. Catherine was no less eager.

‘He is of a good and wealthy family, their estate is but a good day’s journey north,’ said Lord Allen. ‘The young man has inherited one of his father’s estates, not a grand one, for he is the youngest son, but comfortable.’

‘And he is not married?’ said Lady Allen, with a glance at Catherine.

‘He is not married.’

Lady Allen looked satisfied, despite the overly modest feather in the young man’s cap, and Catherine felt a little flutter of happiness, though she could not say why. But it certainly *had* been the most delightful thing of all to dance with such a partner, and she wondered if she would meet him again next morning in the public gallery.

CATHERINE’S HOPES of meeting Sir Henry of Tilney were disappointed next morning, but her disappointment was not deep enough to spoil all of her morning, for a very pleasant occurrence took place in the gallery to console her. The occurrence was that of Lady Allen meeting with an old acquaintance: a widow of the village of Thorpe who had three pretty daughters. The eldest daughter happened to be the prettiest young lady Catherine had *ever* seen. More remarkably, this eldest daughter seemed quite intent on making a friend of Catherine, despite being so much prettier, and four years older. Her name was Isabella, which Catherine thought the most delightful name in the world, far more romantic than the sensible sounding Catherine. To learn that the family of Thorpe knew Catherine’s eldest brother, James, for he was a study fellow of their eldest brother, was even more remarkable and delightful! Isabella seemed to think James the most agreeable young man she had ever met, and Catherine was only too pleased to hear her favourite brother so well spoken of.

Isabella and Catherine walked arm in arm about the gallery, and Catherine grew more and more impressed with Isabella’s knowledge of the

world, for she knew absolutely everything of importance that Catherine was so ignorant of. She knew about fashions, and manners, and about the ways of the king and queen and all the newest talk of the goings on at court, and she knew much of the ways of young men. She could point out a couple and declare them in love, where Catherine only saw two people talking politely; she could evaluate the cost of a lace veil or a jewelled clasp to the nearest ounce in gold, and determine when a gown was only last year's fashion made over, or the jewels on a buckle merely of glass, where Catherine could only see admirable adornment and finery wherever she happened to look. She had not realised just how ignorant she was in the ways of fashion and flirtation, nor how important such subjects were, until she had met her wonderful new friend. She told Isabella all about Sir Henry. She described his tall figure, his brown hair and when pressed to describe the exact colour of his eyes, she settled on hazelnut.

The ladies of Thorpe and Lady Allen and her charge spent the rest of the morning together in flourishing friendship, and parted in the afternoon with happy assurances of being all together again that very evening at the royal fountain gardens, where the jongleurs and musicians entertained the fashionable crowds.

THE EVENING WAS PASSED DELIGHTFULLY, and Catherine was only sorry that she did not see Sir Henry of Tilney at the gardens. She did not see him again anywhere, and his memory began to fade a little as the days passed by and she grew absorbed in her delightful new friendship; but she often thought of him in quieter moments. She went over the story she had been writing for her siblings, and crossed out all the descriptions of Sir Rollande having black hair and eyes the colour of sloe berries, and rewrote him as having brown hair, with eyes the colour of hazelnuts. She even inserted a scene at the beginning where he and Lady Rosamunda danced together at a

ball, and were the most elegant and graceful couple that anyone had ever seen.

She read some of her story to Isabella, who thought it was delightful, and had lots of excellent suggestions as to how Sir Rollande might scale the walls of Baron Blackcrow's castle, and all the different ways he could despatch the wicked servants that tried to hinder him. Her only criticism was that she thought Lady Rosamunda deserved someone with much more wealth. Catherine dutifully added in a detour for Sir Rollande on his way to Baron Blackcrow's castle, and had him win a magnificent castle of his own and a chest full of jewels at a series of jousting matches.

A wet week confined the young ladies indoors, and much progress was made on the story. Isabella had heard some *dreadful* tales from her childhood nurse, and related them to Catherine, who found herself rapt with shock and fear as she heard such things she had never imagined in her life – such murders and abductions, such torturings and terrors, such ghostly goings on, such depths of malevolence and mystery as had never before been conceived in her young mind! Her dreams and waking thoughts no longer dwelt on tall young men who danced uncommonly well, but on daggers and vials of poison, of secret tunnels and secreted treasures. Isabella had to chide her best friend more than once for gazing away into the distance, only to confess that she had not heard her dearest friend's comments and questions, for she had been thinking of how Sir Rollande would be able to find Lady Rosamnuda once she was imprisoned in the underground labyrinth in Baron Blackcrow's isolated castle.

'I'm sorry, Isabella,' said Catherine on one such occasion, as they sat watching the dancers in the ballroom. 'What was it you said about that young man walking by?'

'Why, I said that he looks remarkably like your brother, do you not think? He has the exact height of him.'

Catherine examined the young man in question, and replied that she thought he was far taller than her brother.

‘No, indeed!’ declared Isabella. ‘He is of the most perfect height, as is your brother. And do you not think he has the same mannerism as your brother in the way he flicks his cape across his shoulder? Such a manly gesture, is it not?’

‘James never wears a cape indoors,’ replied Catherine. ‘He throws cap and cape off as soon as he can.’

‘And look at the way he bows to his partner – so elegant! Just like your brother!’

Catherine had never paired the word elegant with her brother James in her life. She had always thought he had the lolloping movements of a bear cub, rather than the movements of a man of fashion. But she did not like to say so. She considered that Isabella was very kind in wanting to praise James so highly. She did not want to deflate her attempts at pleasing her with compliments of him.

ISABELLA’S PREOCCUPATION with the excellent qualities of Master James of Morland seemed prescient, for the very next day Catherine and Isabella were walking carefully through the streets, avoiding the worst of the mud and puddles, when a great hallooing sounded from across the road, and they looked up to see a young man with a wide girth and a wide mouth waving his cap at them, and beside him on a second horse who should it be – but James.

‘It’s my brother John!’ said Isabella.

‘And my brother James!’ said Catherine with great pleasure, and would have run across the road to meet him, but was restrained by Isabella’s arm being firmly linked through her own. ‘Oh, Catherine, my dearest friend,

wait with me and let me gather my senses a moment that I might not be wholly overwhelmed by such a sudden sight of him!’

‘Overwhelmed?’ said Catherine, but there was no time for Isabella to answer, for the horses had been turned about and were now trotting up beside them.

‘Catherine!’ cried her brother. ‘Told you I would see you anon!’

‘Introduce me, Morland!’ said her brother’s companion in a loud voice.

‘Catherine, meet my good friend Thorpe – John of Thorpe.’

Catherine gave a polite curtsy to her brother’s friend, who seemed most jovial with his wide mouth in a big grin.

‘And of course you already know my own dear friend, Miss Isabella,’ said Catherine.

‘Indeed I do,’ said James in an odd tone. Catherine wondered at him suddenly flaring scarlet about the cheeks as Isabella curtsied and greeted him with a strange noise like a sigh.

‘How do you like my horse, Miss Morland?’ cried Master Thorpe. ‘Isn’t she the finest filly you ever did see? I’ll hire a hack for you and take you out tomorrow, and show you how fast she goes, see if I don’t!’

Catherine smiled politely and looked to James, not sure if it was proper of her to accept an offer of riding out alone with a man she had just met, but she had no chance to protest for Master Thorpe was addressing Isabella now.

‘What are you about, Bella? You can wipe that simpering look off your face, Morland won’t be taken in by it! How’s the old witch?’

‘Mother is just fine,’ said Isabella primly.

‘I suppose all the ugly sisters are here? Well they’ll have to shift themselves out of my way, for I’ll be needing a pair of beds for me and Morland, and I won’t be sharing a chamber!’

Catherine was quite certain he must be jesting, and she tried to smile in return when he caught her eye and winked at her. He surely *must* be in jest,

and all his words were for show, for if he was dear Isabella's brother and dear James's good friend, then he must be a good young man in truth.

'See you at the ball tonight, Miss Morland,' said Master Thorpe, gathering up his reins. 'I'll dance the first dance with you – the very first dance, you hear? Don't you be casting it on some other fellow or I'll call him out, that I will!' And he flicked his reins and trotted away, while James waved his cap at them in parting.

THE FAIR LADIES



Lady Eleanor was glad to reach the city and be settled into her own chamber. Her father had hired a maid in Kingston to wait on her, and it was pleasant to have someone to look at and talk to after her weeks of isolation.

The weather was wet, and the first days were spent confined to their rented manor. Her father invited guests to dine with them in the evenings: a steady flow of wealthy men who were either prospective suitors for Eleanor, or who had eligible daughters, on behalf of Henry.

‘How was Lord Scrymgour, my lady?’ Eleanor’s maid enquired that evening.

Eleanor gave a little shudder as she sat on the stool in the dressing chamber while her maid began removing her headdress and hair combs. ‘Oh, Effy, he is so *old*.’

Effy made a sympathetic noise. ‘Did your father think well on him, my lady?’

‘He seemed to. Scrymgour Castle borders the northern kingdom, so there was much talk of how advantageous it would be to have connections between the estates in two parts of the kingdom, and the defence of united strongholds.’ Eleanor’s head drooped as a wave of dejection passed over

her. Her maid combed out her hair with extra care by way of offering some kind of comfort.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING dawned cloudy but dry, and Lord Tilney and his children ventured out to the public gallery to show themselves among the gentility of the city.

Eleanor sat quietly watching the people passing by while her brother and father circulated among the earl's acquaintance. She watched two young ladies entering the gallery. They were pretty girls, and she found herself envying them a little, not for their looks, but for their air of happiness and their obvious pleasure in life as they walked arm in arm around the gallery. One girl was a little taller and more conventionally prettier, her gown and cape highly decorative with ribbons and bows. Eleanor saw she was quite bold in catching the eyes of any young men who would return her look, and she seemed keen to catch the eye of any young man of pleasant countenance she could find. The second girl was simpler in her dress, and plainer in her features, and yet there was something more attractive about her in her unselfconsciousness and demure looks about the room. She looked about her with interest, but she would not meet the eyes of any young men who glanced her way. Eleanor wondered if they were sisters or merely close friends. How good it must be to have a sister or friend to walk so companionably with and talk so confidently to. She had known neither. Not that she desired the companionship of the bold-eyed girl, no matter how pleasing she was to look at. But the younger looking girl with the sweet expression – she might be pleasant company.

The two girls passed out of view, and her father and brother re-joined her.

‘Let us go,’ said her father in his loud voice. ‘I’ve spoken to the only men worth speaking to this morning. We will rest at home this afternoon

and attend the ballroom this evening.'

'Very good, Father,' said Henry, holding out an arm for Eleanor to take. 'We shall enjoy an hour or two of dancing tonight, shall we not, Eleanor?'

'Don't be engaging yourself to anyone, Eleanor,' the earl said over his shoulder. 'I've promised your first dance to Lord Scrymgour.'

Eleanor was too unhappy at this prospect to speak, even had her father not been striding away.

'Never fear,' Henry said gently. 'I'll not see you left alone with Scrymgour all evening.'

HENRY WATCHED his sister obediently dance with Lord Scrymgour, and pitied her unhappy expression. He rescued her as soon as he could from her gruff and ageing suitor and walked Eleanor to her seat. He felt someone's eyes upon him as they walked, and turned his head to see the young lady he had danced with when he had last been in town. He smiled and bowed his head, and was gratified to see her blush and smile in return.

'Who was that, Henry?' said Eleanor. 'She appears to know you.'

'I danced with her when I was last here.'

'She looks charming. I saw her this morning in the gallery. You must ask her to dance if you are already acquainted, she looks as though she is want of a partner, sitting there all alone.'

'So she does. And I am happy to oblige,' said Henry cheerfully.

He left Eleanor with her attendant and made his way to where Miss Morland was sat looking wistfully at the dancing that she had no part in.

'Miss Morland, what a pleasure to see you again,' he said with a bow.

A warm smile lit up her face.

'Oh, Sir Henry, I had almost given up hope of seeing you again!'

'When I saw you last I was only here to secure accommodation for my father and sister. I returned recently with them.'

‘Oh, so that young lady on your arm is your sister?’ said Miss Morland happily.

‘She is. May I ask you to dance?’

She looked happier still, but then her expression fell, as though something unpleasant had come to mind. ‘Oh dear, but I have promised to dance the first dance with Master Thorpe, though we have missed the opening dance, and he still has not come!’

‘No matter,’ said Henry politely. ‘A promise is a promise.’ A young man, stout in figure, came barging up behind Miss Morland’s chair.

‘There you are, Miss Morland! Come along then – off to the dance – take my arm – don’t be shy!’

Henry bowed to Miss Morland, who cast a glance at him over her shoulder as she was pulled away.

‘What are you about, Henry?’ said the deep voice of his father from behind him.

‘Sir?’

‘Make yourself agreeable and go and ask Baron Myddeltoun’s daughter to dance. The one with the pearls about her headdress. Don’t give her too much attention, two dances at most, for I don’t want Myddeltoun thinking I’m over keen. He’s a tight fist and I’ll not have him scrimping on a dowry. Sir Melwin there has brought his ward and niece, he’s not much money, but has a good estate, and his niece is his heir, so you can show yourself kindly to her this evening. Well, what are you about? Off to it. What did I bring you to a royal ball for if not to dance!’

AGITATED SPIRITS & UNQUIET SLUMBERS



Catherine reflected, as she lay in bed that night, that it had been a most disappointing evening. To have seen Sir Henry so unexpectedly, and then to have had to refuse to dance with him because Master Thorpe had made her promise him the first dance – how vexatious! How disappointing! Especially as Master Thorpe had kept her waiting *so* long while he was about his own pleasures in the gaming chamber – and he did not even apologise! She was beginning to think she did not much like Master Thorpe.

She sighed and rolled over. As her mind went over the evening she recalled that while dancing with him he had spoken on and on about his horses, and how good a hunter he was and how skilled a swordsman, and what a good shot he was with his bow, he was quite sure he would be a champion at jousting, had he trained as a knight, he would likely have been the most celebrated of all the dragon slayers! She considered she had done well to stifle her yawns of boredom while he rambled on, and all the while she'd had to watch as Sir Henry danced with one young lady after another, all of them far more handsomely dressed and elegant looking than herself. Why did he not ask *her* to dance again? He could have asked her later that evening. Perhaps she had offended him by her refusal. But then why should

he ask her at all? What was she in comparison to the fashionable, jewel-bedecked young ladies of his acquaintance?

She sighed a second time and rolled over onto her other side. She could hear the sound of a horse on the cobbled street outside, and then the calling out of the night watchman.

She wondered that Isabella could have left her so entirely alone all evening. She had danced with James the whole night, and did not seem to care that her best friend was alone and sinking under disappointed spirits. That was unlike Isabella, who was usually the most attentive friend. She had felt quite neglected by both Isabella and James.

But there had been *one* very pleasing event of the evening – she had found herself standing next to Sir Henry's sister in one of the dances with Master Thorpe, and she had found courage to introduce herself. She thought Lady Eleanor was very gracious in her manner of speech, as well as graceful in her dancing; they spoke for some minutes as they waited their turns to dance down the line. Even in those few minutes she could tell that Lady Eleanor was a very nice and elegant young lady; she had a calmness about her which was most unlike Isabella's lively temper. She wondered that Lady Eleanor did not look about her at all the men as Isabella did, even though she too was an unmarried young lady, and Isabella said every unmarried young lady looked about her at the young men. Catherine considered how Lady Eleanor had seemed a little sad, even when she smiled, but she was so pleasant, she hoped very much she might see her again and talk to her some more. Lady Eleanor had said she would likely be in the public gallery shortly after midday, and Catherine determined she would go there tomorrow at that very time.

With this happier thought in her mind she rolled over one last time and fell into an easy slumber

IT WAS ALMOST NOON next day and Catherine was fixing the clasp on her cloak, ready to walk to the gallery, when there came a rap at the front door. One of Lady Allen's menservants emerged from a side chamber to open it.

'Master Thorpe!' exclaimed Catherine, turning to see the figure at the threshold. 'I was not expecting you. I am just going to the gallery.'

'Going to the gallery!' cried Master Thorpe, 'What can you be about, Miss Morland? We are to ride out into the country – there is James and Isabella – come along, Miss Morland – let's be off – don't make me have to pick you up and throw you in the saddle!' And a bewildered Catherine found herself taken by the arm and hurried down the front steps of the manor and lifted into the saddle of a waiting horse while Isabella and James waved and called out greetings from their own mounts.

'Hold tight, Miss Morland,' cried Master Thorpe. 'These horses are the wildest beasts in the kingdom and will as soon throw us in a ditch as look at us!' And with that alarming declaration he slapped her own horse, cracked his reins and shouted so loudly that Catherine cried out in fear, as her startled horse shot forward.

But it seemed that Master Thorpe had been somewhat mistaken about his half-tamed horses, for when her first rush of terror had subsided, she found that her horse was in fact quite sedate, and no matter how loudly Master Thorpe Hurrah!-ed or Yah! Yah!-ed at his own plodding beast, the horse carried him along at a steady pace without paying him much heed.

'Fine ball last night, was it not, Miss Morland?' said her companion. Catherine was about to make a polite reply, but Master Thorpe carried on. 'So what's old Allen about then, hey? Is it true he's as rich as the king of Albany?'

'Lord Allen?' said Catherine in confusion.

'He's your godfather, is he not?'

'No. No he's not.'

'But he's no children, has he?'

‘No. Lord and Lady Allen have no children.’

‘But they treat you as one of their own?’

‘Well...they are most kind to me.’

‘You practically live with them, do you not?’

‘No, I don’t live with them, at least not at home. But I do see them most every day.’

‘Ho!’ cried Master Thorpe with satisfaction. ‘So you practically live with them – they treat you as good as their own daughter!’

‘I don’t know about that...’

‘And he’s as rich as the king of Albany, is he not?’

‘No. That is to say he is very rich, but not as rich as a king.’

‘Ho!’ cried Master Thorpe. ‘Very rich, you say!’

Catherine was puzzled by his questions. She really was feeling more confirmed in her notions of Master Thorpe not being a very agreeable companion. She must try harder to like him for James’ and Isabella’s sake, but it did seem a very hard task. For the remainder of the journey she had to listen to him once again recounting his skill as a rider and a hunter and all the wonders of his sword handling, and his horse, which was so much better than James’s, or anyone else’s for that matter. He descried James’s horse in such detail that Catherine grew very fearful that poor James had little hope of completing the journey that day without the very mount collapsing beneath him leaving them sitting in the dirt! ‘But we must turn about and go home directly if James’s horse is so bad!’ she cried. But Master Thorpe only laughed and tried in vain to drive on their own horses a little faster.

‘DID YOU HAVE A PLEASANT RIDE, DEAR?’ enquired Lady Allen when Catherine returned later that afternoon.

She was about to reply in the affirmative, but she found she could not say the necessary words, for she could not say that she *had* had a pleasant

ride. The entire experience had consisted of alternating feelings of intense alarm and extreme boredom. So she merely smiled politely and sat down to admire Lady Allen's new pile of ribbons.

'I see you have visited the cloth merchants this afternoon, ma'am,' said Catherine.

'So I have, and *what* a delight it is to be able to step just a little beyond the door and be in a street full of cloth merchants.' Lady Allen sighed with pleasure. 'And we met with your nice young Sir Henry, he was walking with his sister, what a well-dressed young lady she is, and they were most amiable and walked and talked with us the whole way to the merchant's quarter.'

'Oh,' said Catherine, feeling a sinking sensation of disappointment. 'I do wish I had been with you. I should have liked to meet them again. Did they say if they would be at the ballroom or the fountain gardens this evening?' But Lady Allen could not say, though she could say that Lady Eleanor's cloak was full-lined with rabbit fur and her shoes had the most delightful buckles on them, but it was a pity that Sir Henry only wore a falconet feather in his cap.

CATHERINE DID NOT SEE either of the Tilneys that evening, but her fortune changed for the better next morning, for shortly after she entered the public gallery with Lady Allen she beheld Lady Eleanor seated with her maid, and eagerly went to greet her. Lady Eleanor was just as kind and gracious as she had been at the ball, and they talked together most amicably of the charms and pleasures of Kingston.

'Does your brother like Kingston?' asked Catherine. 'He seems to like dancing very well,' she added, before Lady Eleanor could reply. 'I thought he danced very well when I last saw you at the ballroom.'

'He likes to dance very much,' said Lady Eleanor with a quiet smile.

‘I hope he was not offended with me for saying I could not dance with him when first he asked me, for I was engaged to dance with Master Thorpe, or I should very much have liked to dance with him. It was a pity he did not ask me again all that evening, and so I did think I might have offended him.’ Catherine flushed and was vaguely aware that she was gushing a little, so she pressed her lips tightly together to remind herself not to gush any more.

‘I am quite certain he was not offended in the least with you, Miss Morland.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said Catherine, not entirely convinced. There was a pause, and then she could not refrain from adding, ‘I was very surprised to see him that evening, for I thought he had quite gone away from Kingston, for I had not seen him for eight days in between the time we did dance and the other evening when I was not able to dance with him.’

Lady Eleanor smiled politely again.

‘He danced twice with the young lady with the pearl headdress the other night, did he not? I suppose he thinks her very fashionable and pretty? Did you think her very pretty?’

‘Well looking enough, but not *very* pretty.’

Catherine was a little gratified by this assurance. ‘Is your brother to come this morning? Is he to meet you?’

‘Not this morning. He has gone out riding.’

‘Oh. Riding with an acquaintance he has made in town?’

‘With our father.’

‘Oh, how nice.’ Catherine was glad to hear he had not gone out with a young lady, but only with his father.

Lady Eleanor gave Catherine a very thoughtful look; so very thoughtful and serious that Catherine wondered what she could be thinking of. She smiled encouragingly to induce her to speak her thoughts.

‘We met Lady Allen yesterday, my brother and I,’ said Lady Eleanor.
‘We walked together a while.’

‘Oh, I know – and how I wished I could have met with you also!’

‘You were out for a drive with a friend, so Lady Allen informed us. I hope you had a pleasant time?’

‘Oh, no – not at all!’ said Catherine instinctively. Lady Eleanor arched her eyebrows a little at such a response.

‘I felt obliged to go, for they called upon me and took me by surprise – that is, my brother James and my good friend Isabella and her brother Master Thorpe, and Master Thorpe did urge me so strongly to go that I felt I could not very well refuse, but in truth...it was not very pleasant after all.’

Lady Eleanor still looked thoughtful, but did not enquire further.

‘Will you be at the ball this evening, Lady Eleanor?’

‘I believe I will. And...’ she added, seeing the look of bright hope in Catherine’s eyes, ‘I believe my brother Henry will also attend.’

Catherine beamed.

Lady Eleanor then had to leave to keep an engagement, and Catherine curtsied to her in parting and thought again how elegant she was as she walked away with her attendant.

BROKEN PROMISES



Henry saw Miss Morland before she saw him on his arrival at the ballroom; Miss Morland was stood with the stout young man she had named as Master Thorpe.

‘Where’s Scrymgour?’ their father growled. ‘He said he’d be here. I’ll wager he’s in the gaming chamber,’ and he strode away in the direction of the gambling room.

Eleanor saw where her brother was looking and felt she ought to forewarn him. ‘She thinks you very pleasing, Henry,’ she told him quietly.

‘Who?’

‘Miss Morland. I see you watching her.’

‘Only because it is a comedic scene, for that over-sized fellow with the peacock feather seems intent on talking at her, and she seems intent on ignoring him. Look, she turns away and pretends not to hear him!’

‘It is not kind to find amusement in such a scene, Henry. I suspect from the little she has said to me that she may be being thrown in his way. I of all people know the misery of that.’

Henry’s amusement faded.

‘I think she may be on the point of a betrothal with that young man,’ continued Eleanor, ‘for I am sure she would not have gone out with him, as Lady Allen described, were she not.’

‘But if she’s on the point of a betrothal, then there is no harm in her liking me,’ said Henry. ‘For it cannot amount to anything more than a half hour of pleasure during a dance.’

‘No, it can do much harm,’ insisted Eleanor. ‘If you encourage her to think well of you then it will make her situation more unbearable if she is to be married to a man she thinks less of.’

‘I don’t think she is to be married off to that great oaf,’ said Henry. ‘She’s a companion to Lady Allen, and her parents are not present to insist on any match; I think, Eleanor you are misreading the situation because *you* would not feel at liberty to ride out in public with a young man you were not on the point of betrothal with. I believe I am quite at liberty to dance with her for the half hour of pleasure it will give us both, and neither of us will be any the different for it afterwards, and I shall ascertain if there is any betrothal between them, or if any liking on her part.’

‘Take care, Henry,’ was all Eleanor could say in conclusion as her brother walked away to ask Miss Morland to dance.

Miss Morland seemed at least as delighted to dance with Henry as his sister had said she would be. Henry could not help feeling some gratification in having the power of arousing such a response. They stood opposite one another waiting for the dance to begin, when Henry saw Master Thorpe appear behind Miss Morland, who looked first startled, and then vexed.

‘I say, Miss Morland, what are you about? Why, you were engaged to dance the first dance with me! This is a wretched, dirty trick is it not? And who is that fellow, anyhow? You were promised to me!’

‘You are quite mistaken, Master Thorpe,’ said Miss Morland indignantly. ‘I never made any such promise.’

The music began and the dancers took their first steps; Master Thorpe was forced to move away, but he did so with an irritable look and a lot of muttering.

‘What a disagreeable fellow,’ said Henry. ‘I was about to step in, a man has no business interfering with another man’s partner – very bad manners!’

‘I fear he *is* a disagreeable fellow,’ said Catherine. ‘And I certainly never promised him *any* dance, though he did press me terribly.’

‘I quite understand your not liking to dance with such a man,’ said Henry. ‘Choosing a dance partner is like choosing a marriage partner, do you agree?’

‘But what can you mean? I do not see the similarity.’

‘Firstly, in both cases the man has the power of asking, and the lady the power of refusing.’

‘That is so,’ agreed Catherine. ‘But to ask someone to dance for the space of half an hour is so very different from asking a person to spend the rest of their life with them.’

‘And you would not, I trust, assent to spending your life with someone you would not choose to spend a half hour dancing with?’ said Henry, with a glance in the direction of Master Thorpe, who was pacing up and down the edge of the dance floor watching Miss Morland with a jealous eye.

‘I have never given the subject of marriage much thought,’ said Catherine, looking surprised enough for her words to seem truthful.

‘I am sure even without giving the subject much thought you would agree that when a couple enter into an agreement of marriage, they do so with a determined promise not to look about for any other partner or to fancy themselves better off with someone else?’

‘Of course I agree with that, Sir Henry. Everyone knows that. When you marry you cannot get out of it, not ever. But that is not like a dance, which is over very soon.’

‘If that young man should return and talk to you again, you would not consider it acceptable to talk to him while engaged in a dance with someone else?’

‘Of course I would not; in truth I would be glad never to speak to Master Thorpe ever again! I only try hard to like him and be civil because he is the particular friend of my brother.’

They parted for some minutes as they walked around the other couples down the set, then re-joined again at the bottom. Henry felt easier; Miss Morland’s last comment had relieved his mind. His tone was more cheerful as he turned to another subject. ‘Are you enjoying your time in Kingston, Miss Morland?’

‘Very much.’

‘You have not tired of visiting the same places every day for the past weeks?’

‘Not at all. And I do not think I shall ever tire of it. There is so much variety in comparison to my village home, that Kingston will always be interesting to me.’

‘You do not like the country, then?’

‘Oh, very much. But there is such sameness in the country. Here I see different people every day.’

‘But do you not consider life in the country to be more rational?’ Henry asked. He half wondered to himself why he was probing Miss Morland so closely. A recurring thought was pressing at the edges of his mind again: the thought of what it would be like to have the companionship of a cheerful, easy-tempered, good-hearted partner alongside him in his day-to-day life, where at present he had none.

‘More rational?’

‘Here in the city, life is a daily pursuit of amusement. Is there not some degree of irrational vanity in that?’

Catherine seemed to consider this for some moments. ‘I do not think I spend my time in the country any more rationally than I do here,’ she said. ‘In the country I seek amusement in other things, that is the only difference.

In the country I can only think up stories for my siblings and walk down the lane to Lady Allen. Here there are any number of things I may do.'

Henry smiled at her candid answer. The young ladies he danced with, or was ordered by his father to dance with, generally went out of their way to impress him with their accomplishments and industry; Miss Morland's honest answers amused and pleased him. She truly was like no other young lady he had met before.

'It seems there are now *two* gentlemen watching us dance,' Catherine said, looking over Henry's shoulder.

Henry turned his head in time to see his father step toward him.

'What is your partner's name?' his father said in his ear.

'Miss Catherine of Morland, sir.'

'Is she the daughter of anyone of consequence, or are you wasting your time and mine?'

'She is here with Lord and Lady of Allen, sir.'

'Lord and Lady of Allen. I shall make enquiries. You may continue in your acquaintance. It will do Myddeltoun good to see we're not desperate for his daughter.'

'That was my father,' said Henry, composing himself before turning back to Catherine. 'Lord Tilney.'

'Oh,' was Catherine's brief reply, and she looked admiringly after the tall, well-dressed figure of Lord Tilney.

The dance ended. 'Do come and talk with my sister, Miss Morland, if you will? She will like to have your company while you rest between dances.'

'Oh, I should be delighted!'

'She may press you into walking out with her tomorrow morning, for she likes to walk out every morning. I have forewarned you.'

'But I should be delighted to walk out with her tomorrow or any morning!'

Henry was correct in his assertion for, after a quarter hour of conversation, his sister did invite Miss Morland to walk with her next morning. It was agreed that Lady Eleanor and her brother would call upon Miss Morland no later than noontime, so long as the weather proved clement enough for walking.

IT WAS ALMOST NOON next day when the rain eased away, and a faint February sun showed itself. Henry and Eleanor walked to the address Miss Morland had given them to call on her. Two pairs of horses came cantering down the road, and Henry turned toward his sister so his full-length cloak would shield her from the dirty puddles the horse hooves would spatter against them.

‘Thoughtless fools!’ grumbled Henry, as the first horse passed closer to them than was necessary. He looked up at the second one to gauge its speed, and fleetingly met the gaze of Miss Morland as she hurtled by. Eleanor had also seen Miss Morland, and they both turned to look after her in surprise; Miss Morland likewise looked back, raising one hand as though she were waving to them.

‘Well!’ said Henry. ‘I see that something, or someone, more pleasant has engaged our young friend. Most kind of her to wish us a nice walk!’ he added in an ironic tone.

‘Oh, I *am* surprised,’ said Eleanor, still looking after the disappearing horse. ‘But perhaps she has left a message for us at Lady Allen’s house. I’m sure she must have. I’m sure she would not be so rude as to not keep our engagement without good cause.’

They walked the few minutes further to Lady Allen’s rented manor house, and Henry rapped on the door and enquired of the manservant who answered if there were any message for Sir Henry and Lady Eleanor. The servant said that there was not, and the door was closed again.

SUCH ANGRY INCIVILITY



‘*M*aster Thorpe – let go of my horse this instant!’ cried Catherine in the utmost dismay. ‘I must go back! Oh, what will they think of me?’

But Master Thorpe still held on to the halter of her horse, and made a strange noise that sounded half like laughter and half like a shout of triumph, and urged on his horse while pulling hers with him.

Catherine tried to rein in her horse, but Master Thorpe’s shouts and tugs on her horse’s halter had upset it, and it was not inclined to slow down. He let out another maniacal cry and cracked the reins again. She looked back one last time, but knew she looked in vain; Lady Eleanor and her brother were out of sight. She slumped in her saddle and stifled the urge to strike at Master Thorpe’s hands as he rode beside her, still holding her horse by its bridle – dreadful man! She would not try to make herself like him any more – not even for James and Isabella’s sakes!

‘Hey now, Miss Morland!’ said Master Thorpe. ‘You wouldn’t prefer walking along with that princox and his sister to riding along with me, now, would you?’ He grinned at her and she clenched her fists more tightly on her reins.

‘You told me you had seen Lady Eleanor and her brother riding out!’ she cried accusingly. ‘You said they would not be calling for me – you lied

to me!’

‘No, no, dash it, Miss Morland, be reasonable! If I saw a fellow and a filly riding out that looked just the same as your Tilneys – then how was I to know it wasn’t them?’

Catherine did not answer. She turned her head away and determined she was not going to speak another word if she could help it to Master Thorpe for the rest of the journey!

‘DID you enjoy your ride this afternoon, dear?’ was Lady Allen’s enquiry as Catherine and the Allens sat at dinner that evening.’

‘In truth, ma’am,’ said Catherine, ‘I do not think I shall go out with Master Thorpe again.’

‘Very wise,’ said Lord Allen over his carving of the mutton. ‘A young lady riding out in public with a young man gives a decided impression to the world.’

Catherine looked at him in alarm. ‘Oh, sir! Do you mean to say I have been behaving amiss by going out with Master Thorpe?’

Lady Allen nodded benignly and gestured for Catherine to lift her platter to receive the slice of carved meat.

‘Oh, ma’am!’ cried Catherine. ‘I would hope that you would tell me if I make such an error! You did not tell me I was doing wrong!’

‘Well, well,’ said Lady Allen mildly. ‘Young people do like to go about together and take their pleasure.’

‘But I should advise,’ added Lord Allen, ‘that you do not go out alone with Master Thorpe again. Unless...’ he paused as he passed Lady Allen her meat, ‘...unless there is an understanding between you?’

Catherine flushed scarlet. ‘Certainly not!’ she gasped out. ‘Oh, dear! Does it give the impression that there is one by my riding out with him? But

Isabella rides out with James – and there is no understanding between them!’

‘Do not fret, dear,’ said Lady Allen. ‘There’s no harm done, I’m sure. But I too would advise you not to go out again, for riding does dreadful things – having your hood blown off and your hair all mussed up by the wind, and your cloak and gown getting snagged in the harness – dreadful things!’ Lord and Lady Allen were not inclined to speak any further, for they were now fully absorbed in their mutton, so Catherine had no recourse but to sigh and tuck into her own.

NEXT MORNING CATHERINE announced to Lady Allen that she was going to call on Lady Eleanor that she might explain her seemingly rude behaviour the day before.

‘Very good, dear,’ said Lady Allen distractedly, for she was in the middle of discussions with her maid on what ensemble would be best for the visit to the fountain gardens that evening. ‘Tell Radley to follow you.’

Catherine hurried through the streets to the manor house where the Tilneys were lodging. Radley, the elderly footman was struggling to keep up with her quick step. She was eager to clear herself; she had had a most uncomfortable evening knowing that Sir Henry and his sister must be thinking ill of her, and she felt she could not rest until she had apologised. She rapped neatly on the door of the grand looking house and waited impatiently. A manservant answered. ‘Is Lady Eleanor at home?’ she enquired of him. He said that he thought she was, and asked her name. ‘Tell her it is Miss Morland, if you please.’

The servant disappeared for some minutes, and then returned to announce that Lady Eleanor was not at home.

‘Oh dear!’ said Catherine. ‘I suppose you are quite sure?’ The door was closed in reply, and she turned away with a little groan of dismay. She

slowly made her way up the cobbled street, and before she reached the corner she turned back to glance back at the Tilney's house with a last sigh of regret. At that very moment she saw the door to the manor opening again, and out of the door stepped the tall figure of Lord Tilney, and close behind him was the unmistakable figure of Lady Eleanor. Catherine's cheeks flamed with humiliation – Lady Eleanor had refused to see her! Oh – what a bitter blow! And she could do nothing to rectify Lady Eleanor's bad opinion of her, for she was now walking quickly away in another direction with her father. Catherine blinked back tears as she turned and hurried away.

CATHERINE WAS SO DEJECTED she almost did not go with the Allens to the fountain gardens that evening, but she did so want to see the entertainments there, so go she did.

'My dearest Catherine,' exclaimed Isabella when they met at the gardens, 'what exquisite curls, did Lady Allen's maid arrange them? And what a sweet little gown. I declare you'll have all the men looking at you tonight! But I suppose you are only looking out for that Sir Henry of yours?'

'Oh, is he here? Have you seen him?' Catherine looked anxiously about in hopes of seeing the Tilneys. She so badly wanted to have the chance to explain herself to them.

'No, I have not. But here is James – oh my sweetest Catherine, how do I look? I put on my yellow gown, for James said it matched my hair and suited me very well. Your brother says the sweetest things, does he not?' Isabella hurried away to greet James without waiting for an answer. The entertainments began, and Catherine forgot her troubles and laughed as heartily as anyone in the crowds, forgetting, in her merriment, all about the Tilneys, until Isabella tugged her sleeve and said, 'Why, look over there,

Catherine , is that not your Sir Henry? What a good thing John is not yet come, for I declare John is quite jealous of him, you sly creature, making two young men in love with you!’

Catherine turned her head in the direction Isabella indicated to see that indeed it was Sir Henry sitting beside his father, among a party of fashionable looking people. The sight of him reawakened all her agitation, so that she did not even protest against Isabella’s ridiculous comments. All merriment fled from her, for now she could not give her attention to the antics of the jongleurs and actors, but could only keep glancing at Sir Henry, in hopes that she would catch his eye. For two whole acts he never looked her way once – but finally she succeeded in meeting his glance, upon which he bowed politely to her. But his bow was not friendly – she was quite certain it was not, for there was no smile, no look of pleasure, ‘Oh dear,’ she could not help exclaiming softly, for she knew that he was indeed offended with her.

There was no more pleasure to be had from the evening. The entertainments ended, and Catherine saw that Lord Tilney was talking very intently to the lately arrived Master Thorpe, which she thought was a little strange. She noticed Sir Henry was stood momentarily alone, and so she seized the opportunity and hurried to him.

‘Oh, Sir Henry,’ she said eagerly, ‘how glad I am to see you that I might explain myself! Whatever must you have thought of me yesterday when I passed you by! I assure you – I had been quite deceived into believing you had already gone out, and so I thought it must have been considered too wet for you and Lady Eleanor to wish to walk out in, if I had known that was not the case I promise I would not for the world have been persuaded to go out, and, in truth, it was a dreadful time, for I was so upset to see you pass by, and I cried out to Master Thorpe to let go of my horse’s bridle that I might turn round and ride after you – but he would not!’

She was a little breathless after her garrulous outpouring, and she thought that he must think her to be rambling and gushing, but when she dared to look at his face she saw that his cool expression had softened, and the familiar smile of good humour had returned. She took courage from this and said, 'I did try to call on Lady Eleanor this morning to explain, but...' she hesitated, should she admit that his sister had pretended not to be in?

'But she could not receive you,' said Sir Henry. 'She told me of your visit, and she was distressed that she had to send word that she was not at home, but it was at my father's demand that she did so, for they were due to make a visit and my father will not brook any delay when he has an engagement.'

'Oh, I am so glad to hear that! For I thought I had offended her so grievously that she did not want to see me ever again!'

'Not at all, Miss Morland. She was of the opinion that there must have been a misunderstanding yesterday that led to you forfeiting our engagement.'

'I am so glad that she thought so kindly on me! But, Sir Henry, why were you not as kind towards me in your thoughts?'

Sir Henry looked a little taken aback at her bluntness.

'You did not think well of me, I know,' she continued, 'for I saw your expression when first you saw me this evening, you were quite severe!'

He looked amused, but he bowed very politely and said, 'My sincere apologies, Miss Morland, if ever I doubted you for a moment. It will never occur again.'

Catherine was gratified, even if he did seem to be laughing at her a little. She did not mind him laughing at her, just so long as he did not think ill of her.

'So we can take our walk another day?' she said happily.

'Most certainly.'

'The day after tomorrow?'

‘Two days hence it is. My sister and I will be pleased to call on you no later than noon.’

He left her with very different feelings than she had arrived with that evening. She was so restored to happiness, that she would not be put out of countenance even by Master Thorpe appearing at her side and insisting on standing beside her as she waited with the Allens for their chairs home.

‘I did not know you were acquainted with Lord Tilney?’ she could not resist saying to him, despite her resolution to never talk to him again if she could help it. ‘I saw you talking to him this evening.’

‘Why, there is hardly a fellow in Kingston of any value that I am not acquainted with, Miss Morland!’ he said, puffing out his chest. ‘Fine gent, is Lord Tilney. Keeps as good a horse as any I’ve owned. Met him many a time in the gaming chamber, and beat him just as many a time at the dice table too! But hey now, Miss Morland, wouldn’t you like to know what we were talking of half the night?’ He winked and grinned at her and she shrank back a little as he leaned towards her. ‘Why – we’ve been talking half the night about *you*!’

‘Me?’

He winked again. ‘He thinks you to be the finest filly in all the city!’

‘Oh, I don’t believe you. Don’t talk such nonsense.’

‘Nay, Miss Morland, ‘tis too true – and what do you think I said to that? Why, I said it was too true!’

A FRIEND DISPLEASED, A BROTHER ANGRY



Eleanor spent a slow, unhappy hour perched on a chair near the fire with Lord Scrymgour seated opposite. She had no desire to speak, and only did so when directly addressed; the chief of the conversation was between her father and their guest.

‘Tell us of your estate, sir,’ her father said encouragingly. ‘What manner of lifestyle does Scrymgour Castle afford?’

‘Four thousand hectares,’ said Lord Scrymgour, glancing at Eleanor, who was looking towards the fire.

‘Not immoderate,’ said Lord Tilney. ‘And you have a comfortable home?’

‘My table seats no less than forty,’ said Scrymgour. ‘My stables house no less than two-dozen mounts. There’s a suite of chambers as belonged to the late Lady Scrymgour,’ he looked pointedly at Eleanor again as he said this. ‘Mayhaps they’re in need of updating, Lady Scrymgour having departed many years past.’

‘You have no objection to your home being improved by any lady who should enter it as the new Lady Scrymgour?’ said Lord Tilney.

‘None at all. Within reason. Modest improvements. New drapes, mayhaps. That sort of thing.’

Eleanor felt wearied to her bones.

‘It’s as large and comfortable a home and estate as any young lady who has the honour of being the new Lady Scrymgour could wish,’ said Lord Scrymgour.

‘And you are not so far north as to be troubled by the recent spate of dragon attacks?’ queried Lord Tilney.

‘Well...’ said Lord Scrymgour, scratching his near-bald head. ‘Only the one time last year. Lost a field of cattle. But I hear there’s another young man readying himself to hunt the old red serpent down. It’s hoped he’ll have more success than the last fellow.’

Eleanor turned her eyes to her unwanted guest. ‘Who?’ she said, trying to sound calm. ‘Who is the young man who is to try and slay the dragon?’

Lord Scrymgour rubbed his jowly chin. ‘Can’t recall a name. No one of note. Some young foolhard. Would be good news indeed if he were to succeed. Wouldn’t begrudge him the fifty gold sovereigns every noble of the northern kingdoms has pledged to the man who can rid us of the monster.’

Lord Tilney raised his eyebrows, ‘That is a vast amount of gold.’

‘How many men have tried?’ said Eleanor.

Lord Scrymgour pursed his thin lips as he counted up a series of knights from his memory. ‘Mayhaps eight, no, nine, since Baron Wildegard was burnt to a pile of charred bones.’

‘Eight or nine,’ said Eleanor in a faint voice. She looked back at the orange flames in the fireplace and gave a little shiver despite the heat.

‘Fifty gold sovereigns from every noble in the north,’ repeated Lord Tilney. ‘*And* the king’s reward.’

LORD SCRYMGOUR LEFT with the certainty that the daughter of the house was deep in consideration of the size of his estate and the generosity of him agreeing to his late wife’s chambers being fitted up with new drapes. She

was a quiet girl, Lady Eleanor; didn't say much. But that was in her favour. The less a woman had to say the better. So long as she was hale and hearty for bearing sons, and had noble blood in her veins she was fit for the honour of being Lady Scrymgour.

Eleanor was left considering the portent of doom that hung not only over her own future, but of that of Sir Vallentyne. What hope did he have of succeeding in slaying the red dragon when so many had perished trying? Even Baron Wildegard, the famous dragon slayer, had infamously failed to slay the fiery serpent of the north. The entrance of her brother broke her despairing reverie.

'I passed Scrymgour on my way in,' said Henry, sitting beside her. 'No doubt that's the cause for your unhappy looks?'

Eleanor felt too heavy even to reply. She let Henry take up one of her hands to squeeze it in a gesture of sympathy. 'Come for a walk with me,' he suggested. 'The sky has cleared. I'll show you the little meadow of crocuses I found when I was out riding yesterday. You'll be charmed by them.'

She forced herself to give a half smile at his attempt to cheer her. She determined that she was not going to waste the chance to spend precious time with him; in a fortnight she would be back within the grey walls of Tilney Castle, and Henry would be about his business on his own estate. 'I will call for my walking cloak,' she said.

Henry was about to send for his own cloak, though he had only taken it off five minutes earlier, when his father called to him from the antechamber he used for his correspondence work.

'Yes, sir?' said Henry, moving to stand in the doorway.

His father was stood at the small, mullioned window looking out at the street below. 'That young lady you were speaking with at the gardens last night? The girl with the Allens?'

'Miss Morland, sir?'

'Yes. Miss Morland. That's the one. Think well of her, do you?'

‘I...that is to say...yes, sir.’ His father was going to tell him that he must not think well of her. He must not think of her at all. He was going to tell him that he must give all his attention to Baron Myddeltoun’s daughter.

‘Good. She may well do. A girl brought up in the city, like Myddeltoun’s daughter, might not thrive in the country. But your Miss Morland is used to country life. She might do very well. We could make some extensive improvements at Pineston.’

Henry waited for clarification of his father’s meaning, but his father was looking out of the window with his hands clasped behind him as though he had forgotten he was speaking to his son.

‘Was there anything further you wished to speak of, sir? If not, I will take my leave to escort Eleanor out for a walk.’

‘Well don’t stand there like a halfwit, Henry. Be off with you if you’ve a mind to walk out.’

Henry made a polite bow and turned into the entrance hall where Eleanor awaited him.

The walk was pleasant, and the meadow of flowers brought some moments of joy to Eleanor’s heavy heart. They were sorry to be returning back to their father so soon, but they knew it was unthinkable to be late for their father’s precise hour of dining.

‘What was Father speaking of just before we set out?’ Eleanor asked, as their lodgings came into view.

‘I’m not entirely sure,’ said Henry. ‘He seemed to be telling me to set my matrimonial sights on our friend, Miss Morland.’

‘He did?’ Eleanor was as surprised as her brother. ‘I thought he had settled on Baron Myddeltoun’s daughter.’

‘So did I.’

‘But is it certain that Miss Morland is free? That she is not on the point of a betrothal with that young man we have seen her with so frequently?’

Henry shrugged. 'I cannot say for certain. But I don't believe so. She does not care for him, I am certain of that.'

'What was the young man's name? I can't recall?'

'Well, you may ask him yourself, for look if it isn't the very fellow himself coming at us and waving us down!'

Eleanor turned to see, and sure enough the stocky form of Miss Morland's possible suitor was rushing towards them, waving his arm about his head and crying out, 'I say – Tilney! A word if you will!'

Henry and Eleanor stood watching as the young man neared. His mouth hung open as he panted hard from chasing after them. 'Dash it and deuce take it if I haven't run you down this past half mile!'

'It must be of great importance,' said Henry, feeling annoyed at the fellow's coarse language in front of his sister.

'I understand, Tilney, my fellow, that you've a neat little arrangement to walk out with Miss Morland tomorrow morning.'

Henry only stared in reply, refraining himself from telling the presumptuous fellow to mind his own business.

'I'm sent by Miss Morland, who, I may add, is a very close acquaintance of mine – very close – near to being the closest kind of acquaintance a fellow can have in a young lady – if you understand my meaning – and I'm sent by her to inform you that she cannot keep her engagement tomorrow morning, for she has just recalled that she has a more important engagement with myself.'

Eleanor could feel her brother tensing with anger, and quickly replied that they understood that Miss Morland had a prior engagement, and were very sorry to lose the pleasure of her company the following morning, and wished him good day and to please give their greetings to Miss Morland. Then she tugged gently on Henry's arm to encourage him to walk away before he said something uncivil.

‘Well, that is a pity,’ she said as they resumed walking, quickening their pace a little, for the interruption had delayed them some minutes. ‘Though there is something about that man I do not trust. I wish I could see Miss Morland for myself to be sure of her wishes.’

They reached the manor house and hurried into the hall, casting off their cloaks almost before the attendant servants could reach them. They rushed up the stairs to the gallery where their father liked them to sit until dinner was made ready. Scarcely had they entered the room, where their father was pacing up and down in some agitation at their delay, when the door flew open again and a young and anxious voice cried out, ‘Oh, Lady Eleanor – I just had to run and tell you without one moment’s delay!’

‘Miss Morland!’ exclaimed Eleanor, looking half in surprise at the sudden appearance of an agitated Miss Morland, and then looking half in fear at her father who would be furious to have a delay on his impending dinner. How could the servants have let a visitor come up at such an hour!

Miss Morland seemed to notice the presence of Lord Tilney only at the moment Eleanor had looked at him. She now looked even more anxious; as well she might, if she knew how unwelcome he would think her. Miss Morland gave a curtsy and spoke hurriedly again.

‘I am so sorry to come up without being announced – I saw you enter in, and the door was open and I rushed up, for I had to speak to you and tell you that Master Thorpe’s message about me being engaged to him tomorrow morning is quite in error – and I would not break our engagement for tomorrow’s walk for all the world!’

‘I am very glad to hear it,’ said Eleanor, wondering how she could escort Miss Morland out as quickly as possible without seeming rude. She felt horribly torn between her father’s wrath and the awfulness of appearing uncivil. But then her father’s deep voice boomed across the gallery as he strode towards them.

‘Miss Morland, is it not?’

Miss Morland curtsied a second time.

‘What a delight to see you in our little rented abode. How is it you were not announced? What shameful inattention to you, please do not be displeased, I beg of you, I don’t know what the servants are about – but they will certainly be reprimanded!’

‘Oh no, sir, it was not due to inattention, I assure you it was entirely my own doing, for I rushed past your servant in my haste to see Lady Eleanor – I assure you it was all my own doing!’

Lord Tilney smiled at her, showing his teeth. ‘Come and dine with us, Miss Morland. Share our table, such as it is.’

‘Oh, you are too kind, Lord Tilney!’ said Miss Morland with a third curtsy, ‘but Lord and Lady Allen will be expecting me, and I daresay I am late already!’

‘But of course; and Lord and Lady Allen must not be deprived of their amiable young companion. But you will come and dine another day very soon, Miss Morland, as soon as Lord and Lady Allen can spare you? Come for dinner and supper one day very soon.’

‘Oh, I thank you, sir, I should be delighted above anything, and I am quite sure Lord and Lady Allen will spare me any day you choose!’

The anxious face of the butler appeared in the doorway to announce that dinner was ready. His anxiety was due to having to deliver such an announcement almost ten minutes later than the master expected.

‘Tell the servers to keep it hot for ten minutes more,’ Lord Tilney ordered in a surprising tone of mildness. The astonished butler vanished from the doorway.

‘Let me escort you down, Miss Morland,’ said Lord Tilney, putting out an arm for her to rest her hand upon. ‘Do take care on the first step, it is a little steep. My, what a charmingly light step you have, Miss Morland. I can have no fear of you stumbling, you are all elegance and grace to be sure.’

A SCHEME OF GREAT HAPPINESS



Catherine hurried back to the Allens on leaving the Tilney's house. She was not entirely pleased to see that Isabella, James, and Master Thorpe were waiting for her by the thatched wellhouse where the roads diverged between the Thorpe's lodgings and the Allens'.

'I have told Lady Eleanor!' she declared as she reached them, her voice a little breathless from her haste. 'I am to walk out with her tomorrow morning as arranged!'

'The deuce take it, Miss Morland!' cried Master Thorpe. 'What are you about? Why do you want to go and break up our party for a mere walk?'

'Oh, Catherine, I do think it is the most unkindest thing in the world of you!' cried Isabella. 'I would not have thought it of you to be so excessively cruel to your friends and your brother!'

'I say, Catherine, it's a sorry business,' said James. 'We were looking forward to our ride out tomorrow no end. Had it all planned out – basket of roast chicken for dinner and all!'

Catherine stood facing her three disappointed companions with a look of resolution on her flushed face. 'I am more sorry than I can say to disappoint you, but my engagement with Lady Eleanor was made before you planned tomorrow's outing, and it was wrong of Master Thorpe to tell

Lady Eleanor that I could not keep our engagement, *very* wrong! Why, it was a lie!’

‘Nay, it was no lie!’ argued Master Thorpe. ‘Dash it, Miss Morland, what’s a morning walk compared to a whole day’s outing with your friends?’

‘With your best friend in *all* the world,’ said Isabella with an air of grievance.

‘And your own brother,’ added James dourly.

‘You’ve spoilt *everything*,’ said Isabella, dabbing a corner of a handkerchief to her eyes. ‘I can hardly believe it of you. It is such a *little* thing to have asked of you, just to delay your walk by one day.’

‘It is not a little thing to keep a promise,’ said Catherine.

‘Deuce take it if I don’t carry Miss Morland off in in the morning and throw her across my saddle,’ said Master Thorpe in a half growl that made Catherine step back in alarm. ‘And I suppose that Tilney fellow will be sidling along beside you tomorrow, hey?’

‘I must get back to Lady Allen; they will be expecting me for dinner. I’m sorry to disappoint you all, but it was very wrong of you to try and break my engagement with Lady Eleanor, and it was more wrong of you to try and hold me back and restrain me when I wanted to run back and tell her the truth. I think you have all behaved badly to me. A promise is a promise.’ And she turned and hurried away, feeling that she was in the right, but still distressed at having Isabella and James so vexed with her, and alarmed at the look on Master Thorpe’s face, for an image of him throwing his cloak over her head and dragging her away, crying out – hey now, Miss Morland – now I’ve got you – and you shall never get away – no never – hah!, while bundling her onto his horse and riding off at breakneck speed was most vivid in her mind.

ALL CATHERINE'S hopes and wishes came to pass next morning. The day was free from the incivilities of rain, and Master Thorpe did not attempt an abduction that he might carry her off to a picnic. Lady Eleanor and her brother called for her, and the promised walk came to pass. The pace was comfortable, the view at the top of the hill was rewarding, and the conversation was easy. Catherine still thought Sir Henry a little too fond of laughing at her, but she was not inclined to take offence. So long as his laughter was good-natured, and accompanied by his pleasing smile, she was perfectly content.

'I recall you telling me, Miss Morland, that you were fond of telling stories to your siblings?' said Sir Henry.

Catherine affirmed that it was so.

'How many siblings have you?' asked Lady Eleanor.

'Nine. James is the eldest, then there is Richard and Edmund, then me, next is Sarah, who likes to call herself Sally, she is sixteen, then Mary, twelve, Tom who is ten, then Anne, George and little Harriet who is four.'

'Goodness,' exclaimed Sir Henry. 'That *is* a prodigious family.'

'How lovely to have younger siblings,' said Lady Eleanor wistfully.

'I suppose you are very close, seeing as you only have each other?' said Catherine.

'We have an elder brother,' said Sir Henry. 'He is on a jousting tour at present, but he's due to join us in town shortly.'

'But you have no mother?'

'Our mother died many years ago,' said Sir Henry. 'Near ten years ago.'

'It was ten years on mid-winter night,' said Lady Eleanor quietly.

Catherine wondered to herself that Lord Tilney had never married again after so long a time as a widower, but she did not like to speak of it in case it was upsetting for Lady Eleanor.

'Tell me more about your stories,' said Sir Henry, deftly changing the subject. 'I suppose they are sweet tales to illustrate how good little children

ought to behave?’

‘No, not at all, though Mama would have me tell such stories. They are adventures, and romances.’

‘Ah,’ said Sir Henry. ‘Let me guess, there is always a young heroine who captivates the heart of a young hero who must prove his worth in defeating enemies and winning glory that she might look upon him and give her heart.’

‘A little like that,’ said Catherine, wondering how it was he could foretell her story so well. ‘My brothers and sisters are not much interested in winning hearts, and such, except for Sarah, they much prefer the parts about defeating enemies.’

‘And I assume such enemies include wicked nobles, fire-breathing monsters, perhaps a goblin, or a giant or two?’ said Sir Henry.

‘You are well acquainted with such stories?’ said Catherine, wondering if he could somehow have seen her own written tale, for how did he describe it with such accuracy?

‘Do not be fooled by my brother’s mocking tone, Miss Morland, for no one loves a good adventure story more than he.’

‘Nor a good romance,’ added Henry.

‘Would it not be the most exciting thing in the world to really be *in* a story?’ said Catherine with childlike eagerness.

‘Would yours be an adventure or a romance?’ asked Sir Henry.

‘An adventure. And perhaps a romance.’ She felt her cheeks grow hot as she said this, and hoped they did not notice.

The walk concluded even more delightfully than it had begun, for Lady Eleanor invited Catherine to dine with them next day, to which Catherine accepted with the utmost pleasure.



CATHERINE SAW nothing of Isabella or James that evening, and hoped they would not be angry with her for long. She was still worrying over it next morning while Lady Allen's maid dressed her hair. James would forgive her, for he was her brother, but Isabella had shed tears and accused her of betraying their friendship in choosing Lady Eleanor over her. She was still musing unhappily on the subject when a note was delivered from the estranged Isabella urging her to call on her as soon as she could, for she had something of the utmost importance in the whole world to tell her dear and best-loved friend. Catherine was only too pleased to still find herself addressed as friend and called for her walking cloak.

‘OH, MY SWEETEST GIRL!’ cried Isabella on Catherine's entrance, ‘Do sit down by me directly, and I will tell you all – though I know you have likely guessed all already and will not be the least bit surprised!’

Catherine was surprised, and could guess at nothing. Isabella shooed her younger sisters out of the room and closed the door on them.

‘I know you are teasing me, Catherine, in saying you know nothing, for I know you are too sly a creature and too knowing in the ways of young men and young ladies not to have seen everything!’

‘My dear Isabella, do tell me your news at once, for I am sure I cannot guess at it!’

‘Oh, you are such a tease!’ said Isabella sitting beside Catherine and tapping her on the hand. ‘But I *had* to ask you to come directly – for you alone can ease my anxiety, for you alone can tell me what your father will think of me and if he will consider me *utterly* unworthy as merely the daughter of a widow with very little dowry – oh, do ease my heart, my best beloved Catherine! Do tell me that he will not deny us – for how will I bear it, when your brother is the most delightful man in the whole world?’

‘My father? My brother? My dear Isabella what can you mean?’ A ray of understanding flashed into Catherine’s confused thoughts and suddenly she thought she did discern her friend’s meaning. ‘Oh, Isabella – can it be? Can you mean that you and James...?’

Isabella laughed prettily. ‘I knew you had seen it all along. Yes, my sweet Catherine – James and I are betrothed, and you and I are to be sisters!’

Catherine was astonished, and then she was delighted, and so she said so, and listened intently to her new sister-to-be describing the whole progress of the passion that had sprung up between her and James. Catherine had some difficulties in recognising the brother she had grown up with in Isabella’s descriptions of him as the most handsome and delightful man in the whole world. She could only picture James as a long-limbed youth whom she had delighted in chasing about the gardens, rolling down hills with, and wading through streams together throughout their childhood summers. She found she had to acknowledge that the power of love was powerful indeed, for now clumsy, roistering, good-natured and modestly intelligent James was transformed into a young man of perfections and graces that she had never before perceived.

She was able to offer comfort to Isabella in assuring her that their father was a man who did not place the highest value on material things, and who would not deny James permission to marry the lady he loved merely because she did not have a sizeable dowry.

‘I am so excessively relieved to hear you say so!’ cried Isabella. ‘It is an absolute *agony* having to wait to hear from your father whether or not he will give his consent!’

The subjects of Isabella’s engagement and Isabella’s ardent love and Isabella’s anxiety over the consent of her marriage were dwelt upon the whole of the morning and on into the afternoon. The rift between the two

friends had been healed and their union made stronger than ever by the prospect of becoming sisters.

Isabella's mother and brother knew of the romantic situation, and they only awaited for James to return with his father's permission before they could announce the betrothal as quite settled; until then all was to be kept secret, even from the younger Thorpe daughters.

A FULL DAY and night had to be endured before James returned with the pronouncement that would settle or shatter all hopes.

'My father gives his consent!'

Isabella almost swooned, Mistress Thorpe called for celebratory wine, Master Thorpe drank all the wine and called for more, James beamed with delight, and Catherine was most generous with her share in giving compliments and rejoicing with the happy couple.

'But James, dear, what did your father say about my having very little money?' said Isabella, when she had recovered from almost being overwhelmed with joy.

'He thought little of it, as I told you he would. Once I've finished my apprentice studies he will settle a little cottage on us, and enough of an estate that we shall get by comfortably enough until I can build up my own business.'

'A cottage?' said Isabella. 'A little cottage?' She looked confused. 'Are you certain you did not mishear him? Did he not say a little manor?'

'I hope you're not disappointed, Isabella?' said James, his beaming smile dimming into an uncertain one. 'I told you we would not be rich. I may be the eldest son, but I have nine siblings whom my father wishes to provide for when they marry. He has given me the largest portion.'

Isabella gave a little high-pitched laugh. 'Do not be ridiculous, you silly, dear boy. Why, I *love* a cottage.' She sipped at her cup of wine. 'Exactly

how large *are* the cottages in your part of the kingdom? ’

James had to tear himself away from his beloved Isabella to attend to his studies, and Master Thorpe was to leave with him. Catherine found herself momentarily alone with Master Thorpe while Isabella and James were saying their farewells in the hall.

‘So, Miss Morland,’ said Master Thorpe, ‘what a scheme of Morland and Bella’s is this?’

‘Scheme?’

‘This marrying business. Bella’s bagged her rabbit, and Morland’s got his mare into his stable. What think you of weddings, Miss Morland?’

‘I think it is all delightful.’

‘Ah, glad to hear it! So you have no objections to a wedding? How about we hitch up and take a ride ourselves, Miss Morland – what say you to that?’

‘I don’t know why you ask, Master Thorpe, for I know you are leaving just now and have no time to go out for a ride.’

‘Sometime soon – a few weeks or so from now?’ he urged.

‘I shall be back at home by then.’

‘What say you to me calling on you at home?’

‘I am sure my family would be pleased to meet you as a future family member,’ said Catherine politely.

Master Thorpe’s wide mouth grinned with pleasure. ‘I knew we felt the same way on this subject – I knew it!’ He laughed heartily.

Catherine was not sure what to make of such jubilation over so small a matter as him visiting his sister’s future family, but she curtsied and wished him a safe journey, and left the room.

PARENTAL TYRANNY & FILIAL DISOBEDIENCE



Henry was as attentive to Miss Morland as his father could wish when the young lady joined them for dinner. But he had little opportunity to speak to her while at the table, for his father dominated the conversation. One of the things Henry decided he liked about Miss Morland was that her thoughts and feelings were very transparent; they showed themselves readily across her young, open face. She was not a young lady who wore a mask of politeness and disguised her true feelings behind careful speech. She said what she thought, and said it with a charming simplicity. He had never met a young lady quite like her. Even Eleanor, whose heart and mind he admired, was not prone to sharing her thoughts and feelings openly; Miss Morland was very refreshing, he decided.

But he was sorry that on this occasion her evident feelings were not altogether good ones. When his father showered compliments upon her she was pleased, if embarrassed, but there the pleasantry ended. When his father reprimanded the servers she was alarmed at the harshness of his language. When his father spoke brusquely to Eleanor, Miss Morland looked grieved at seeing her subdued into silence. Miss Morland also showed that she was perplexed at the alteration in her friends, and awed into quietness herself by his father's loud assertions. It was unfortunate that his father had been put into a bad temper by the failure of Frederick to arrive. Frederick had been

expected at dinner, but did not enter until the last course. If there was one thing his father could not abide it was a person being late to the dinner table.

In short, the meal was not a pleasure to Miss Morland, and Henry was sorry for it. He determined he would make it up to her that evening at the ballroom, and promptly asked her if she would engage herself to him for the first dance as they left the dining table. The expression on her face at this request showed that this did please her, and he could not help but be gratified at her happiness in so small a matter as dancing with him.

‘WHO’S that pretty little thing stood talking with your intended?’ said Frederick on arrival at the ballroom.

‘She’s not my intended,’ said Henry.

‘From what Father has to say on the matter she is,’ argued his brother. ‘But who is the fair damsel next to her?’

‘That is Miss Isabella of Thorpe. I’ve just learnt that she is betrothed to Miss Morland’s brother.’

‘Is she now? Then it’s no love match, or she would not be giving me such looks as she has. Introduce me, Henry, she’s by far the prettiest in the room, and I’m up for some sport.’

Henry reluctantly made the introduction before leading Miss Morland to the ballroom floor.

‘I am sorry that your brother has asked Isabella to dance,’ Miss Morland said as they stood together, ‘for she will not dance with anyone except James now.’

‘But you are mistaken, Miss Morland,’ said Henry, nodding in the direction of her friend. Miss Morland gave a little gasp of surprise to see Isabella walking with his brother to a place in the dance.

Miss Morland did not let her friend's inconsistency spoil her dance, but she was clearly preoccupied in watching her over the course of the evening, and was looking more and more surprised as she saw Miss Thorpe not only talking and laughing with Frederick, but standing up to dance with him not once, but three times! 'Sir Henry,' said Miss Morland on the occasion of this third dance, 'I beg you would speak to your brother and tell him that Isabella is betrothed. I fear he likes her very much, and I am worried that he will be terribly disappointed when he learns of the situation, I am sure I cannot understand why Isabella has not yet told him, nor why she is dancing with him when she told me this evening that she would not dance with anyone except James.'

'My brother knows of Miss Thorpe's status,' Henry replied.

'But then why does he continue to pay her such attentions?' Miss Morland's eyes were wide with confusion.

Henry did not want to speak badly of either his brother or Miss Morland's friend, so he only said, 'My brother and Miss Thorpe are both of an age to know what they are about. We would do well not to interfere, Miss Morland. Frederick would not take kindly to his younger brother telling him whom he may dance with, and I am sure Miss Thorpe may feel herself at liberty to change her mind with regard to dancing this evening.'

ON THE JOURNEY home that night Henry had to witness his father berating Frederick for dancing more than twice with the Thorpe girl. 'Don't you go entangling yourself with any more inferior young ladies, Frederick,' boomed their father from the saddle of his horse. 'Your alliance with the Caldronheds is in hand. As soon as the girl comes of age it will be all tied up. Don't you be getting your name entangled with any one else! If you lose the Caldronhed heiress then I've a mind to send you up north as the next dragon slayer – fifty gold guineas from every noble in the northern

kingdoms and a king's reward – consider that, if you will! I've a mind to send you even if you *do* get the Caldronhed girl. Fifty gold guineas apiece! Think what improvements could be made to the estates!'

Frederick said nothing, but Henry could sense his brother's irritation, and the journey home bristled with resentment. Henry wished his father had a better understanding of Frederick, for Henry knew that if Frederick were forbidden by his father from doing something, then Frederick would be fuelled by his own strong will to do that very thing.

HENRY WAS RIGHT in his conjectures regarding his brother, and thus it happened that Miss Morland's anxiety for her friend increased daily, as Frederick pursued the fair Isabella with the single-mindedness of a hunter tracking down his quarry. Henry watched it all, and wished he could spare Miss Morland's unhappiness at her friend's obliging part in the matter.

Lord Tilney, seeing that his eldest son was paying him no heed, and paying Miss Thorpe much heed, determined to conclude the matter by announcing that he was cutting short their stay, and they would all be returning to Tilney Castle within a few days.

Henry found himself almost as sorry as Miss Morland was when his sister broke the news to her. He wondered that he should feel such disappointment at his acquaintance being so abruptly ended. He had thought he resented his father's assertions that he should pursue her, and he did still resent the idea of trying to win any woman for her wealth, so why did he not feel relief at his father dropping the idea and dividing them? Why did he feel a strong disappointment at being separated from her?

He was more sorry for his sister, for he knew that it had been a solace to her to have a friend these past weeks. Poor Eleanor would be returning to the isolation of the castle where all her sorrows would weigh more heavily upon her than while she had some relief in Kingstown.

But their father issued a second declaration next morning at breakfast. He declared that Eleanor was to engage Miss Morland to accompany them back to Tilney Castle for a visit. Eleanor was to beg Miss Morland with all the charm she could muster, for Lord Tilney had determined upon the plan, and would be most displeased if it were not achieved.

To everyone's satisfaction Miss Morland was granted permission for the visit, and was delighted to accept. Such satisfaction ameliorated Lord Tilney's displeasure at Frederick announcing he would not return to Tilney Castle for another fortnight or so. He was going to stay with acquaintance in the city, and his father could tie him to a hurdle and drag him back if he so chose, but beyond that Frederick would return in his own time. He had fought hard at the jousts at his father's bidding, though he had not won enough to please his father, and now he was going to recover a while among the pleasures of Kingstown.

MORTIFICATIONS & PLEASURES



‘Oh, Catherine, dearest creature in all the world, what shall I do without you when you are gone away to Tilney Castle!’

‘You will be returning home a week from now, Isabella, and James has promised to come very soon. It is very good of him to say he will work day and night at his studies that he might gain a few days to spend with you when I am gone.’

‘Yes,’ sighed Isabella. ‘But it is *very* bad news that he has sent about having to wait so long until our marriage. Why must we wait two years? Why cannot your father just take back the estate that is to belong to James? And why can’t we marry in the meantime? He does not explain it well. It is *excessively* vexing.’

‘There are laws about taking back an estate that is under tenancy,’ said Catherine. ‘And you cannot marry in the meantime, for you will need the income from the estate to live on.’

‘Yes. To live in our cottage. Our little cottage.’

‘My father has been very generous,’ said Catherine, feeling a little upset at her friend’s air of discontent. ‘I am sure he could not be more generous.’

‘I know he has,’ said Isabella, sitting up taller as though to shake off her mood. ‘I am just so *excessively* disappointed at your leaving me, Catherine – what shall I do without you? I suppose I shall have to fend off Sir

Frederick Tilney all on my own, for he *will* insist on sitting with me whenever I meet him, and he will *not* relent from asking me to dance every evening, so that I find I have to oblige him just to be rid of him! I know he is considered very handsome, though I prefer a man of milder colouring and a middling height, such as James has, to a tall knight with a dark, impassioned eye.'

'Impassioned?'

'I mean to say – impertinent,' said Isabella with a little laugh. 'Oh, Catherine, what shall I do without you? And poor John – he will be quite put out when he hears where you have gone. I dare say you will come back with an offer from Sir Henry, and then which one shall you choose? You sly creature – to have two men wanting to marry you, why, what would you think if *I* were to have two men wild for me? I dare say you would laugh and call me a sly creature just as Sir Frederick does!'

'I'm sure I would not,' said Catherine feeling very unsettled. 'And I don't know what you mean about me having two men wanting to marry me, I have not one such man, and I certainly would not wish to have two.'

'Oh, you are a tease, you little imp – for you know very well that John is wild to marry you and near enough considers you engaged to him, James told me so in his letter. He only looks to calling on you at home that he might speak to your father and get his consent – and, oh, if only there were not such a delay between me and James we could have had a double wedding – think of that!'

'Considers me as good as engaged to him!' cried Catherine. 'My dear Isabella, you are most mistaken, your brother is most mistaken! Why he has certainly *never* asked me, and I have certainly *never* agreed to such a thing!'

'My dearest creature, don't jump up like that as if a dog had bitten you! John said he spoke to you just before he went away, and you were most

encouraging and agreed to him calling on you at home to speak to your father.'

'I, encourage him! Impossible!' cried Catherine.

Isabella gave a thin laugh, 'Sweet Catherine, do not distress yourself. There is no reason to declare such protestations to me. I quite understand how things are. I quite understand you would not wish to be fixed in a betrothal to John when there may be a possibility of a better match, for, fond as I am of John, I see that Sir Henry might offer a far more comfortable home and income than John is able to. Sir Henry has a handsome house on his estate, I am sure. I am sure he has a *very* comfortable manor house, has he not? And poor John will likely only be able to afford a mere...cottage.'

'My dear Isabella, I beg you would tell your brother that there is most decidedly no betrothal, nor any thought of one between us, and neither have I any expectation of one from anyone else. Not anyone. And I wish you would not speak to me on the subject again!'

THE MORNING of Catherine's departure for Tilney Castle dawned and found her already awake. She was to join the Tilneys early for breakfast and then they would set off on their long ride.

She was more excited about journeying to stay in a castle than she had been to journey into the royal city – a castle! It was a pity it was not a rugged fortress, high on a craggy mountainside, defending the borders, isolated and grim and surrounded by gloomy forests; but even a comfortable castle of the middle kingdoms, housing a worthy earl and his loyal knights, dwelling among peaceful neighbours was more romantic than anywhere else she had ever visited.

Her excitement was a little repressed by Lord Tilney's loud voice across the breakfast table. 'Try the ham, Miss Morland, care you for apple butter?

Why is there no apple butter with the ham?’ he shouted, and a server rushed to fetch a bowl of apple butter, which Catherine then felt obliged to take, though seeing the servants bellowed at in such manner quite took away her appetite. She had never heard the Allens, nor her own parents, shout at servants in such a way.

‘Send for Sir Frederick,’ Lord Tilney ordered another servant, and when Sir Frederick did appear near the end of the meal, his father upbraided him for his laziness and his idle ways and his slovenly habits and his want of manners in not coming down when there was a guest at the table, and so many other failings that Catherine blushed furiously for Sir Frederick, and thought how dreadful it was for a full-grown man to be so abused for nothing more than coming down late for breakfast.

She wondered that Sir Frederick did not seem troubled by such a tirade as he buttered his bread and drank his beer. He did not look pleased, to be sure, but neither was his appetite spoilt, as hers was.

Sir Henry and Lady Eleanor said barely a word throughout the meal, and Catherine was heartily glad when Lord Tilney put down his knife and declared it was time to be on their way.

‘See you in a fortnight or so, Frederick,’ said Sir Henry as he left the table.

‘I’m sorry to be seeing you so soon,’ said Sir Frederick in a growl, too low for his father to hear. ‘I’d sooner never see the old pile of stones again till *I* was the only master there.’

CATHERINE RODE BESIDE LADY ELEANOR, flanked by two of Lord Tilney’s men while Lord Tilney and Sir Henry led the way. She had never ridden so fine a horse as the one provided for her. It was such a pleasure to ride out on so mild a day for late February, and it seemed no time at all before they were stopping for a noontime meal at a wayside inn.

Catherine was dismayed to find that Lord Tilney's bellowing at servants was not confined to his own house, for he shouted at the servers in the inn with as much vigour, and made such a protest at the quality of the meat and bread that was offered, that Catherine once again felt her appetite slip away, which was a new sensation to her, she having had a good appetite all her life till now.

Just as they prepared to resume their journey it was found that Lady Eleanor's horse required a new shoe. Lord Tilney suggested Sir Henry should ride on with Catherine, and they would catch up with them anon. Catherine felt a flush of anxiety at this suggestion, thinking of Lord Allen's admonition that a young woman riding with a young man was a sure sign to the world of an attachment. Was it proper for her to agree? But surely Lord Tilney would not have suggested it if he thought it wrong? And Sir Henry was smiling at her as though he thought it a good thing, so she allowed herself to be assisted onto her horse, feeling blissfully happy to be riding alongside Sir Henry, with no fear of him grasping at her harness when she wanted to stop, or driving on her horse too fast, or failing to slow if she should ask him to. She felt safe and happy, and all of Lord Tilney's bawling and bad tempers were as nothing to bear in contrast to the pleasure of a long ride into new lands by the side of Sir Henry.

'THERE IT IS,' said Sir Henry, 'up on that hillside, with the mountains behind – that is Tilney Castle.'

'But I see no castle,' declared Catherine. 'And I see no mountains. All I see is mist.'

'And that is why they call them the Hidden Mountains. We get a good deal of mist up here, Miss Morland, being on the highest point of this part of the kingdom.'

It was disappointing not to come upon the flowing pennants and soaring ramparts of the castle, towering in splendour over them in their approach. It was a pity that she could only pass out of the mist into a dimly lit hall, for the evening was drawing in, and the candles had not yet been lit. Lord Tilney soon followed them in, shouting for torches and candles, and before Catherine could even look about her, she was gently pulled away by Lady Eleanor, who told her that dinner would be served very promptly, which left them only a very short while to get ready. And as Catherine was now familiar with the importance of promptness at the hour of dining she allowed herself to hasten after Lady Eleanor.

A PILLOW STREWED WITH THORNS & WET WITH
TEARS



Eleanor felt the shame of her father's severe manners, and wondered that Miss Morland should bear them so patiently. She also wondered that Miss Morland should have agreed to come to Tilney Castle; she did not flatter herself that it was entirely due to Miss Morland's attachment to herself, she was quite certain the attraction lay in another quarter. But it would be a comfort and a pleasure to have so pleasant a companion for as many weeks as Miss Morland could be persuaded to remain with them. It softened the dread of returning home, and the exertion of entertaining Miss Morland would force her not to dwell on painful thoughts and fears – thoughts of Vallentyne, and fears for his life if it were true that he had gone north on so dangerous and deadly a quest. She could not think of it – if she did it rendered her almost incapable of moving and speaking rationally. She must bury her grief and fears deep down and be all that she ought to her guest. And if her father's wishes came to pass, and Miss Morland and Henry married, that would be a delightful thing. She would never know such happiness for herself, but she would be glad for Henry to find it.

THERE WAS only time to show Miss Morland to her chambers when they arrived before rushing away to change out her travelling cloak and gown for dinner. It was a pity their return home had been earlier than expected, for if Dorothy had known a guest was coming she would have lit the candles in Miss Morland's chamber, and had a good fire blazing in the hearth. In the grey light of the early evening the guest chamber was gloomy and chilly, and Eleanor was sorry to have to leave her young friend standing in the shadowy room, the dark oak furniture and dark red bed-drapes casting a gloomy aspect. She could only apologise profusely to Miss Morland before hurrying away to dress.

Supper was no more pleasant a meal than the noontime dinner and breakfast of that day had been. On this occasion their father was angry that the meal was not up to the usual standards of his table. His butler assured his master that had they known of their lord's unforeseen arrival, then all would have been prepared to their lord's liking. But the butler's excuses were no more acceptable than the lack of fresh bread or variety of dishes set before him.

'My apologies for the inferiority of my table in comparison to that of Lord and Lady Allen's,' her father said to Miss Morland. 'I know you must be used to more variation than you see here before you, but I assure you that usually my table is better laden. My estates, including that of Henry's, provide more than enough to furnish a good table.'

Miss Morland assured him that the table was excellent, and Lord and Lady Allen kept a far simpler one. This gratified her host, and he was a little less terse with the servers for the remainder of the meal.

A storm had gathered as they sat at dinner. Lord Tilney congratulated himself that they had arrived home without getting caught up in the wind and rain that could now be heard outside.

An early night was recommended after the long and weary journey of the day, and Eleanor escorted Miss Morland to her chamber and was glad to

see that the fire had been made up, and a lit candle was at the bedside. She bid her friend good night, expressing her hope that the storm outside would not disturb her too much.

Eleanor retired to her own bedchamber, taking little comfort in the familiar walls and possessions she had returned to. She stood at the small window, watching the flashes of lightning arc across the sky, momentarily lighting up the country below. The boom and roar of the thunder, and the sword-like strikes of lightning were satisfying to her mind. They resonated with the strong, wild feelings she was striving to hide when in company. But then the wind came, moaning and screeching across the heathland and up the stone walls and buttresses of the castle. It shook the leaded panes of the window, rattling them and shrieking as though it desired to get in and carry her away with it – as though it demanded to claim her as kin to its misery.

She shivered and closed the shutters at the window. She must not allow herself to indulge in such fancies. She must try to sleep, and resist weeping into her pillow yet again that night.

EFFUSIONS OF FANCY



Catherine stood in her chamber with her candlestick in her hand. The fire had been lit while she was at dinner, so the room was less chilly than when she had first arrived, but the blaze had not been maintained, and now it burned low; its soft glow was the one source of cheer in the large, shadowy chamber. The storm was growing wilder outside, and white flashes of lightning pierced a gap in the shutters at the window. She moved towards the window, pulled the shutter open, and stood looking out at the stormy night. Thunder boomed like the striking of a drum-skin and the lightning was ferociously bright – lighting up the hills and heath below. Then came the wind, howling furiously up to the castle walls and shrieking at the window. A cold draught made her shiver, and her candle flickered wildly, then sputtered out. She fastened the shutter and hurried into bed, not wanting to be left awake in the darkness now her candle was extinguished and her fire was but glowing embers. She chided herself for her foolishness – how could she be afraid of a mere storm? But chide as she would she could not quite drive away vivid thoughts of giants stomping thunderously across the heath, nor goblins creeping about the walls in the dark, nor wind-monsters shrieking at the window – and promised herself she would never tell her siblings another scary story again!

She buried her head beneath the blankets knowing she could not sleep with such terrors sounding in her ears and in her mind. But somehow she did, for when she next opened her eyes it was morning.

THE CHAMBER LOOKED VERY different by daylight. It was still a little gloomy with its dark panelling and furniture, and the drapes around the bed were still the dark, rust-red colour that had made her think of dried blood the night before. But the looming and lurking shapes in the corners of the room really were just chests and a wardrobe and a pair of heavy chairs, and when she bent down to examine the panelling in the wall near to her bed she saw the telltale hole that explained the scrabbling and scratching she had heard in the night: it had been no imp, it was a mere mouse she had heard, and Catherine was too much of a country girl to be frightened of mice.

She opened the ancient-looking chests, wondering if there was anything of interest in them, but she only found neatly folded bed linen in one chest and a pair of worn out shoes in another. The wardrobe was empty, but something caught her eye on the topmost shelf. She had to pull a stool over to stand on so she could reach the pale object she could glimpse. It was a scroll of papers, and she untied them eagerly – perhaps she would find a forgotten map, or the diary of a long dead nobleman telling of some past mystery or tale of woe! But to her disappointment she found only a pile of receipts and inventories; there was nothing of interest or mystery: a tanner's receipt a farrier's bill, a list of saddlery. She rolled them back up and returned them. But as she shoved the roll onto the shelf it jarred against something solid. She stood on tiptoe, trying to peer at the back of the shelf, but she could not reach. She looked around and spied a tall, carved chair; the chair was heavy, and she was flushed with the exertion of dragging it across the floor to stand on, but she was rewarded for her exertion by

finding a small casket at the back of the shelf – which was far more promising than a sheaf of bills! The casket was of carved wood and it opened to reveal a lock of hair and a small letter, folded up tightly. The hair was a single curl, of a mid-brown colour. The letter was short:

Beloved,

I think of you day and night, and I have no fear of any abuse Lord T would levy at me, not even of losing my life, but I am fearful of what punishment will fall upon you. We must not prolong this secrecy, we must find a way to be together.

Yours eternally,

The name at the end of the letter had been torn off, presumably to protect the writer's identity. Who was the person addressed to as Beloved? Who would levy abuse and punishment on this person? Surely the reference to a Lord T must mean Lord Tilney? Who was in fear of their life from him? There was a knock at her chamber door, and she thrust the note back into the casket, back into the wardrobe, shut the doors, and had just time to drag the high-backed chair away when Eleanor came in.

'Good morning, Miss Morland. Oh, you're not dressed yet, I do apologise, shall I send Dorothy to help you? Are you well, you look a little flushed? Breakfast will be ready shortly.'

Even in her state of fluster Catherine understood the worried look on Lady Eleanor's face when she mentioned the readiness of breakfast.

'Oh, I have only my shift and gown to put on and I shall be ready,' promised Catherine, snatching up her clothes from where she had left them the night before and hurrying into the antechamber to dress.

'I hope the storm did not keep you awake?' called Lady Eleanor. Catherine could hear her pacing up and down.

'Not too much,' called back Catherine. She soon reappeared to Lady Eleanor's obvious relief. 'Is my headdress straight?'

‘It is,’ Lady Eleanor assured her, ‘and here are your shoes.’ She was at the door now, and Catherine hurried after her.

LORD TILNEY WAS in a more cheerful mood that morning. Catherine found herself looking frequently at him and pondering the words of the letter she had read. Who was in fear of their life from Lord Tilney? How old was the letter? Was Lord Tilney capable of killing or harming someone if they displeased him? She watched as he took up his knife and vigorously speared a thick slice of meat, and she shivered a little at her certainty that he was *most* capable of such violence. He was a knight, after all. He must have killed people.

‘Are you well, Miss Morland,’ said a friendly voice. ‘I thought you shivered a little just then. You’re not in a draught, are you?’

‘Oh, no, Sir Henry, I am quite well, thank you.’

‘When do you leave us, Henry?’ said his father from the head of the table.

‘Directly after breakfast, sir. There will be much for me to attend to after my absence.’

‘Do you go away?’ said Catherine.

‘I do, Miss Morland. I believe I mentioned that my home is on my own estate a morning’s ride away. But I will return soon, in two or three days.’

‘Is it a pleasant place, your home?’ asked Catherine.

‘You would call Pineston a fine place, would you not, Henry?’ interrupted Lord Tilney. ‘What do you say, Eleanor? What is your feminine view?’ He did not wait for either of his children to answer but continued on: ‘A little over a thousand hectares. Large flocks of northern breeds. Decent stables, room for some improvement, but all will get done in time. Extensive walled vegetable gardens, and the house has a good aspect, does it not, Henry? A new building, Miss Morland, built by my father and uncle.

Only lacking one thing to complete its comfort and turn it from a lonely house into a home with the comfort of companionship, is that not so, Henry? I am sure Miss Morland can guess at my meaning?' He leaned forward and looked pointedly at Miss Morland with his smile that showed his teeth.

'Oh,' said Catherine. 'I am not very good at guessing. Perhaps you mean Sir Henry needs a dog or two? They are wonderful company if one lives alone.'

Lord Tilney drew back with a frown, and Catherine felt she had said something foolish, but Sir Henry caught her anxious eye and smiled. 'Excellent idea, Miss Morland,' he said. 'I have often thought the very same thing.'

SIR HENRY DEPARTED JUST as the morning mist was lifting. An early March sun showed its face, which was very welcome after the rain and storm of the previous night.

'Should you care to see the castle and the grounds, Miss Morland?' said Lord Tilney.

'Oh, I should love to!' said Catherine, who was longing to look about the castle.

'Would you like to venture out into the grounds first, or see inside?'

Catherine was about to say she would very much like to see inside first, but Lord Tilney was declaring they would go out, for he was sure Miss Morland would like to take a morning walk. Catherine stifled her disappointment, and said she would go and get her cloak and hood.

Catherine concluded after two hours had passed that Lord Tilney was very fond of his grounds. She expressed admiration and praise with all politeness as he showed her his walled vegetable beds, his coppices, his storage barns, his dairy, and his meadows. The country had enjoyed peace

for so long that the grounds of the castle had almost a domestic air about them.

‘Shall we walk back to the castle through the scotch pinery, sir?’ Eleanor asked her father. ‘I think Miss Morland may be in need of refreshment after so long a time outside.’ Catherine smiled gratefully at her.

‘What?’ said Lord Tilney, looking displeased. Catherine feared he was going to rebuke Lady Eleanor, but he glanced at Catherine, and restrained whatever angry words he had been ready to speak. ‘Are you tired, Miss Morland?’

‘I am not very tired, sir, but I am a little damp.’ She looked down at the hem of her gown and cloak, which had soaked up the rainwater from the ground as they had walked. Her feet were squelching inside her shoes, for they were not thick-soled.

‘We will return directly,’ said Lord Tilney, ‘but not through the pinery, I detest walking that way.’

‘Why does your father detest walking through the pinery?’ Catherine asked Lady Eleanor, as they followed after her father.

Lady Eleanor looked unhappy. ‘It was my mother’s favourite walk,’ she replied.

Catherine wanted to ask why that should cause him to hate it. She would have thought he would have liked it above all things if it had been a favourite place of his wife’s. But Lady Eleanor always looked so sorrowful when her mother was talked of that Catherine did not like to pry, so she said nothing, and only wondered at the strangeness of Lord Tilney hating something his wife had loved. Had he not loved her? It was difficult to imagine him loving or showing affection to anyone. He could show very good manners when he chose to, and be quite charming, but on closer acquaintance Catherine had to conclude that he was a bad tempered, impatient man. What kind of husband had he been?

Catherine barely had time to change out of her wet gown and dry her sodden feet when Lady Eleanor was knocking at her door again to say that noontime dinner was nearly ready. She hurried down to the hall, wondering if she would be able to look around the castle that afternoon, for she was longing to explore it all.

A WIFE NOT BELOVED



Eleanor could tell how eager Miss Morland was to be shown around the castle. She suggested to her father over the noontime meal that she might show their guest about afterwards, for he seemed to have lost enthusiasm for the scheme he had promised Miss Morland that morning.

‘Yes, yes, show Miss Morland over the castle,’ he said dismissively, more interested in his venison pie. Then his voice changed and became deep and forbidding, ‘But not the west wing,’ he said, pausing from his eating with his knife raised up.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Eleanor, keeping her voice light and even, for she was aware of Miss Morland’s look of surprise and of her staring at her father as though she were frightened by him.

Miss Morland’s fear did not persist once they were alone again; she was very eager to look about, and so the tour began. Eleanor did her best to make, what seemed to her, the very commonplace rooms seem interesting, summoning up all that she knew of the history of the castle.

‘That is the sword of Ranald the Brave,’ she told Miss Morland, pointing up at the broad sword that hung above the great stone fireplace in the hall. ‘He was found as a baby, left inside a basket in the stables.’

‘Oh,’ exclaimed Miss Morland, looking delighted at such a tale. ‘And was he half fey, as foundlings so often are?’

‘It is not said so,’ said Eleanor. ‘But he showed great skill with a sword and with horses from a young age. He was raised as a squire to my great-grandfather, and went on to win renown in battle. The king granted him his own land and title, and he married the king’s niece.’

‘How romantic!’ cried Miss Morland. ‘Do his descendants live on?’

‘Only a daughter survived into adulthood. She was said to be very beautiful. She married my great-uncle. He built the house that Henry now dwells in. He died without an heir, and so the estate passed to my father, and then to Henry when he came of age.’

‘It must be a very grand house if it was built for the daughter of a niece of a king!’

‘It was not built for my great-aunt. It was built for the seneschal who was to manage the estate. But it is a very comfortable and well-built house.’

They passed through vaulted rooms, some large, some small. There was an abundance of dark, heavy furniture, a bewildering number of staircases, and innumerable passages, all of them gloomy and unlit at that hour of the day. The bedchambers all housed curtained beds of dark velvet and ponderous chests squatting in corners. There was nothing to Eleanor’s mind that was of great interest, but Miss Morland seemed to enjoy looking into every corner, trying every door and exploring every passageway.

‘This is Henry’s chamber, when he is here,’ said Eleanor. Miss Morland peered round with evident interest.

‘He is fond of books and furs, I see,’ she said. ‘It is a very sparse room.’

‘That is how he likes it.’

‘Your own chamber is not so sparse, I warrant, Lady Eleanor?’

‘Come and see.’

Miss Morland was pleased with Lady Eleanor’s chamber. She admired the few trinkets she possessed, and the soft gold colour of the bed curtains. She declared that it was so very elegant and spacious in comparison to the attic bedroom she shared with her sisters at home.

They had wandered through most of the castle, including climbing the steep, winding stairs up to the turrets. Miss Morland even desired to see the kitchens and the weaponry and supply chambers; there was nothing Lady Eleanor did not show her – except the west wing. Miss Morland stood before the studded door that led to the forbidden wing; she put a hand on it as though she dearly hoped it would open beneath her fingers. ‘Why does your father not wish me to go in there?’ she asked.

‘That wing houses the chambers that belonged to my mother. No one is permitted to go into her chambers except Dorothy.’

‘Why is the housekeeper allowed in when you are not?’

‘She keeps things dusted and clean. My father likes everything to stay as it was. And there are still some antechambers in use.’

‘But wouldn’t you like to see your mother’s rooms and all her things? Would it not be comforting? I know if my mother died I should like to see her familiar things about me, I should be terribly upset at being banished from them.’

‘It would be a comfort to see them,’ admitted Eleanor.

‘Oh, I think it is monstrous of your father to keep you from your mother’s memory!’ cried Miss Morland, but then she flushed and looked immediately remorseful, ‘Oh, do forgive me, Lady Eleanor, it is very wrong of me to speak so – do forgive me!’

‘There is nothing to forgive, Miss Morland. You are quite at liberty to speak your mind. I am sure you have only spoken what I myself have often felt.’ Lady Eleanor turned and walked away; when she did not hear Miss Morland’s step behind her she looked back. Miss Morland was still staring intently at the forbidden door.

All the remainder of the afternoon and evening Eleanor caught Miss Morland looking at herself, or at her father, with that same intent look. She wondered what Miss Morland was thinking of. Miss Morland asked a few more questions about her mother, and looked very strange when Eleanor

replied that she had not attended her mother's burial, nor indeed had seen her at the time of her death. She explained that she had been away from home at the time of her mother's illness and her swift, unexpected death. Miss Morland thought that most dreadful and shocking, and did not trouble her with any more questions.

HORRID SCENES



Catherine could not stop thinking about Lady Eleanor's mother and Lord Tilney. She lay in bed, looking up at the bed canopy while her troubled thoughts roiled around her mind. Who was the writer of the letter? Who was it that feared Lord Tilney punishing them, perhaps killing them? It was apparent to her that Lord Tilney despised his wife's memory – hating her favourite part of the grounds, shutting up her chambers – even forbidding Lady Eleanor from seeing her mother's things. What did it all mean? She tossed and turned a while, then gradually felt herself drifting into an uneasy sleep.

She sat bolt upright in bed. What had awakened her? It had been a loud noise – like something smashing on the floor outside her chamber. Had she dreamt it? She listened hard. There were sounds. Footsteps, as though people were hurrying along the hall outside. Perhaps something was wrong? She slid down from the tall bed and lit a taper from the embers of her fire. The stone floor was cold to her bare feet, so she put on her slippers and pulled a shawl about her before cautiously opening her chamber door.

There was no one in the hall. All was dark. But she could still hear muffled footsteps; someone was moving about in the dead of night. Her heart was beating, but curiosity compelled her to follow the sound.

She followed the noise of footsteps and found herself nearing the west wing. She could see the studded door that Lady Eleanor had said was forbidden to pass through. She caught her breath as she stood in the dark hall clutching her candle – the door was ajar. Someone had passed through it. Was it Lord Tilney? She was filled with fear, but she had to move forward – she had to see.

Beyond the door was a long, shadowy corridor; her candlelight was too feeble to show her much; she had an impression of a large, dark space, housing she knew not what. A new sound reached her – a dreadful sound, an awful sound – the sound of moaning and crying, a woman's voice crying out in pain. She followed the sound, her breathing growing shallow; she felt almost faint at the thought of what she would find.

There was an archway, and from beyond it came the sound of voices and the awful, terrible moaning and cries of pain. Step by step she crept forward – passing down a short, narrow hallway, where lamplight glowed from a chamber at the end. The door was partly open, the terrible sounds were coming from within. There was a table just inside the door and she covered her mouth to stifle down a cry as she saw a man's hand place something horrific on the table: an iron implement – most surely an instrument of torture – for dripping off the end of the cruel object was red blood!

Her knees were shaking, her stomach was churning, what should she do? What would happen to her if she called out? She heard another voice, a woman's voice – the voice of Dorothy, the housekeeper, she was sure it was.

'I'll fetch some more,' said Dorothy's voice, and indeed it was the old housekeeper coming out of the room. Catherine turned and fled, her candle extinguishing in the sudden movement. She ran almost blindly through the dark halls, feeling she was in a nightmare and desiring only one thing – to get back to the safety of the bolted door of her chamber!

She paced her chamber in a state of horror. What should she do? Who should she tell? Was it cowardly of her not to have gone into that room and demand that such vile violence be ceased? Her mind was swirling as the grey light of dawn lightened the shadows. A story shaped in her mind that seemed to explain the dreadful mystery of it all – surely Lady Tilney had been the beloved of some brave, noble lover who sought to rescue her from the tyranny and cruelty of Lord Tilney. Surely Lord Tilney had discovered them – had killed the brave, noble lover and punished his wife by shutting her up where no one would ever see her again – and was now inflicting terrible revenge upon her by terrorising her night after night, while his wicked accomplice – Dorothy – helped him!

Should she tell Lady Eleanor? No. Not without further evidence. How she wished Sir Henry were here! She would summon up the courage to go back to that dreadful room, she would see for herself what dreadfulness lay beyond the forbidden door. She would go immediately – but what if she were captured? What would Lord Tilney do to her? Would he make her seem to disappear? Would a story be told to her parents that she had suffered some dreadful accident, or had gotten lost out in the mists and perished?

She went to her writing box and took out the story she had been penning for her siblings. If she perished, then perhaps her belongings would be given to her family. She opened her jar of ink and hurriedly finished the final lines of the story, telling of Lady Rosamunda's imprisonment in the little chamber in the forbidden west wing of Baron Blackcrow's castle. She wrote of Sir Rollande duelling with the baron, their sword-fight carrying them out onto the ramparts of the castle, where they fought in the half-blinding mist until Baron Blackcrow, standing over the wounded body of Sir Rollande, about to thrust a deadly blow, suddenly slipped in a pool of Sir Rollande's blood, lost his footing and fell from the ramparts to his demise.

Sir Rollande staggered back into the castle, where the wicked housekeeper broke down at the knowledge of her master's death, and revealed all. Sir Rollande bound up his wound, then rushed through the castle, seeking high and low until he found the hidden door in the west wing – discovered the half-dead Lady Rosamunda, cut her bonds and carried her away to safety.

Catherine wrote: *This is a true tale. If the reader of this would seek the writer of this story, they must look where Sir Rollande looked.*

She blotted her last lines and put the finished tale into the drawer of her writing box. She had done what she could. If she were captured, she had laid the clues to her rescue. Now she must steel herself to confront and uncover the wicked secrets of Tilney Castle – whatever the consequence.

A STRANGE BUSINESS



Henry was pleased he had found all things in good order on his estate during his absence. He concluded that he could ride back to the castle a full day early and spend some time with Eleanor and Miss Morland. He hoped his father had not overpowered Miss Morland with his brusque ways. He was glad for Eleanor to have a companion – and so very sweet natured a companion. He had no wish for Miss Morland to be made unhappy by his father’s manners.

‘Morning, sir,’ greeted the butler.

‘Morning, Meldrum. Has my father breakfasted yet?’

‘Not yet, sir. None of the family has come down as yet. You’re as early as the morning larks, sir.’

‘I set out at first light. There’s nothing like watching the sun come up from the saddle of a horse, Meldrum. The world looks a different place in the new light.’ Henry let the butler take his cloak. ‘How is Swannoc?’

‘Not so good, sir. The surgeon was called in last night.’

‘Was he? I shall go up and see if there’s anything I can do.’

‘Very good, sir.’

HENRY WALKED through the silent halls; only the kitchens were alive with the rattle of pans and the sound of busy servants, the castle was otherwise quiet. Frederick should be returning soon with his men, and then the castle would resume its usual air.

He reached the door to the west wing and found it already open. He walked down the long hall and turned under the archway, where somebody spun round at his appearance and gave a little scream. 'Miss Morland!' he exclaimed, rushing forward to catch the swooning figure.

'Oh, Sir Henry!' she gasped out, clinging to his coat like a drowning girl clinging to a rope.

'Miss Morland, are you ill?' She seemed to recover strength a little and let go of him, standing up and taking a small step back. 'You are so pale – whatever is the matter, Miss Morland?'

'There!' she cried, 'Did you hear that?' Her eyes were wide and her face was ashen.

He listened, and the sound of moaning floated along the hall from the chamber beyond. 'It's poor Swannoc,' he said. 'But are you ill, Miss Morland – pray tell me what is wrong?'

'Swannoc?' said Miss Morland faintly.

'Come and see, if you are able to walk. If not I will assist you down to your chamber. But how is it you are up here so early in the morning?'

Miss Morland was behaving rather oddly. She was now rushing towards Swannoc's chamber and was stood in the doorway, clinging to the stone wall as though she were in need of support. Henry stepped in after her and stood before the bed where a thin and heavily lined face groaned from under a linen bed-cap.

'Morning sir,' said Dorothy, who was sat beside the bed. She half stood up to bob a curtsy.

'My word, Swannoc,' said Henry to the figure in the bed, 'that's a fair sized bruise on your poor face. I'm sorry to see you in such a state.'

‘She’s a good deal better this morning, sir,’ Dorothy told him. She resumed her bathing of the bed-bound Swannoc’s face.

‘I hear you had to get the surgeon in?’ said Henry.

‘Yes, sir. Just before dawn he arrived. He pulled it clean out with his iron puller, and it’s sore and swollen today, but the worst of the pain’s over with now, isn’t that right, Swannoc?’

Swannoc nodded in between moans.

‘I’ll send Meldrum up with some wine and myrrh,’ said Henry. ‘That will ease the pain.’

‘It will, sir.’

Henry turned his head to speak to Miss Morland who was still stood leaning against the doorway. ‘Bad tooth, Miss Morland. Poor old Swannoc’s been suffering for some time. She couldn’t be persuaded to have it pulled by the surgeon until it became unbearable, isn’t that so, Swannoc?’

Swannoc nodded again between a pair of groans.

‘I’ll send up the wine directly,’ said Henry, turning away.

‘I hope I didn’t wake you in the night, Miss Morland?’ said Dorothy. ‘I dropped my candlestick as I was passing near your chamber when I brought the surgeon up. It made a noise fit to wake the dead.’

Miss Morland only stared in reply.

‘May I escort you to your chamber, Miss Morland? You still look alarmingly pale. Would you like Dorothy to bring you a breakfast tray if you are feeling too unwell to join us in the hall?’

‘Oh, I thank you, Sir Henry, but I am quite well.’ She said faintly, but she took his arm, and leaned heavily upon it as though she were feeling weak. ‘Who is Swannoc?’ she asked as they walked slowly down the hall.

‘She was my mother’s waiting maid, and before that, my mother’s nurse. Her health declined after my mother’s death, and so she has remained in her old chamber. Dorothy is her niece, and she takes care of her. My father would not have her turned away.’

‘Oh. That was kind of him.’

‘My father is a man of contradictions, Miss Morland. I know he often seems rough and harsh, but he is not wholly bad at heart. He is very sensitive in all things pertaining to my mother. Her death was a grievous blow to him; I do not believe he has every fully recovered. His temper very much declined after her death.’

‘So...your mother and father were happy?’

‘I don’t doubt that my mother had much to forbear. But I believe they loved one another.’

‘Oh. And there was no one...your father did not...kill any one...was not jealous...?’

Henry looked at her in surprise. ‘I am sure I do not understand you, Miss Morland. What can you be referring to?’

Miss Morland seemed to crumple up as she burst into tears, and out came a torrent of words about a letter and a lover who was murdered and an idea of Henry’s mother being held captive and punished in dreadful ways.

Henry was astonished. ‘Miss Morland. I think you are confusing one of your stories with reality. Please consider what you are saying!’ Miss Morland sobbed more piteously and begged that he would forgive her before pulling herself from him and rushing away. He heard her footsteps running down the stairs, and knew she had reached her chamber by the sound of her door slamming shut.

He stood for some minutes, rubbing his forehead as though that would help him understand such strange behaviour. Then he turned away to seek for Meldrum that the jug of wine might be sent up to poor old Swannoc.

AWAKENED



Catherine was too distressed to go down to the hall for breakfast, she could not bear to face Sir Henry – what must he think of her? She wept and blushed with shame every time she thought of the look on his face. He had been appalled at her foolish imaginings – as well he might! She was lost forever in his good opinion, she knew that, and she wept bitterly for it. She did not realise until the moment of losing him how much she felt for him – how very precious his good opinion of her was, nor how much she...loved him.

Lady Eleanor was so concerned and so attentive that Catherine forced herself to recover enough to go out for a walk about the grounds with her friend later that morning. She bathed her swollen eyes and made herself tidy, and put on a brave face as they set out.

But her brave face fell away as Sir Henry met them in the hall, and by his cloak and boots it was clear that he intended to walk out with them. She felt mortified, and could not bear to look at him, but stared miserably down at the floor and wished she were far away. But Sir Henry was saying something to her, he was saying that he hoped she was recovered after her disturbed night; he hoped she had been able to rest this morning. Would she take his arm and be sure to let him know if she was at all tired at any point during their walk.

She was astonished at his courtesy. She took his arm and dared to glance up at him. He was smiling very kindly at her.

Catherine's spirits were almost recovered by the end of their walk; not once did Sir Henry allude to the awful events of the morning, but chatted amiably to herself and his sister as they walked through the pinery and between the laurel hedges. She spoke very little herself, still feeling crushed by her feelings of humiliation, but by the end of the walk he had managed to coax some words and a smile from her, and she felt comforted.

A COURIER HAD DELIVERED some missives from the royal city while they had been out walking; among them was a letter for Catherine. 'A letter for me? I never expected to receive any!' She hurried to sit down and opened it with excitement. 'Oh, it's from my brother James!' she declared happily. Lady Eleanor seated herself close by with her embroidery work, and Sir Henry was looking over the letters his father had given to him to reply to on his behalf.

'Oh no!' cried Catherine, one hand flying to her heart. 'Oh dear, no! How can it be? Oh it is dreadful – just dreadful!'

'My dear Miss Morland,' said Lady Eleanor. 'Has something happened to your brother? I do hope not.'

'Something utterly dreadful *has* happened! James and Isabella's betrothal has been broken!'

'Oh, that is unfortunate news.'

'Oh, but it is worse! It is so much worse! Oh, how shall I tell you!'

'Tell me what, dear Miss Morland?'

'Isabella has broken her betrothal to James that she might become betrothed to another!'

'That must be very distressing to your poor brother; I am very sorry to hear it.'

‘But, Lady Eleanor, how shall I tell you who it is she is now betrothed to? It is to Sir Frederick Tilney himself!’

‘To Frederick?’ said Lady Eleanor in surprise.

‘Frederick?’ echoed Sir Henry. ‘Frederick betrothed to Miss Thorpe? Impossible!’

‘But no! It is so! James says so – read for yourself!’

Henry took the outstretched letter. ‘It seems your brother considers Miss Thorpe as good as engaged to Frederick,’ he said when he had quickly read the short letter. ‘But I must say, Miss Morland, that it is highly unlikely.’

‘But why should James say such a thing if it is not so?’

‘Perhaps the attentions passed between Miss Thorpe and Frederick have led your brother to conclude that a betrothal is imminent. But my father has not been applied to, and Frederick would be very foolish to consider contracting himself to any young lady without my father’s consent. Indeed, my father would prohibit it entirely.’

‘But is not your brother due to come very soon?’ cried Catherine. ‘Will he not speak to your father when he comes, and then it will be announced?’

Sir Henry exchanged a glance with his sister.

‘Has Miss Thorpe a large dowry or inheritance, Miss Morland?’ Lady Eleanor asked.

‘Why, no. She barely has anything. And yet she seemed so disappointed with my father’s settlement on James – it was quite unaccountable to me!’

‘Is she of a titled family?’ asked Sir Henry.

‘No, not at all. Her father died when she was young, and he was a scribe or a lawyer, or something of the sort.’

Lady Eleanor shared another look with her brother. ‘Then it is not likely, Miss Morland,’ said Sir Henry, ‘that my father will permit such a union. Frederick is his heir. My father requires both wealth and title for him in his choice of wife. Indeed, I believe such a marriage has already been arranged. I think your friend will find her hopes and heart as disappointed

in Frederick as your brother's are in her. I am as sorry for you, Miss Morland, as I am for your brother, for you must feel very unhappy in this loss of a friend.'

'I never was so deceived in a person in all my life!' cried Catherine. 'I could never have believed she could use poor James so ill! To cast him off in such a way! To leave him in such misery! I am sorry that I will likely never see her again, but not as sorry as I would have expected, for my eyes are opened to her now. Indeed, this day my eyes are opened to myself also I am both ashamed and undeceived of many wrong notions this day.'

She dared to glance up with some embarrassment at Sir Henry as she said these last words. He caught her look, and showed that he understood her meaning by smiling kindly and saying, 'Your feelings do you credit, Miss Morland. As does your newfound vision.'

IT WAS AGREED among the three that they would say nothing of Frederick's entanglement with Miss Thorpe to Lord Tilney. Sir Henry was to dine with them that evening, and spend another full day with them before he had to return to his duties on his estate. He continued to be so kind and attentive to Catherine that by the end of the day she had passed from utter misery in the morning to absolute happiness by bedtime, secure in the knowledge that he had forgiven her and she had not ruined his good opinion of her forever.

There was more happiness to be had at breakfast next morning, for Lord Tilney announced across the table that it would be a desirable outing for them all to ride over to Henry's estate with Henry the next day and take a noontime dinner of bread and cheese with him. 'You would like to see Henry's little abode, would you not, Miss Morland?' said Lord Tilney.

Catherine flushed with pleasure and said she would be delighted. And so it was settled. They were all to travel there next morning.

Catherine was therefore surprised when Sir Henry announced after breakfast that he must ride home directly. 'But I understood we were all to travel with you on the morrow?' she said.

Sir Henry gave a little laugh. 'Miss Morland, my father is coming for dinner on the morrow. I must go and make the preparations.'

'But your father made a point of saying we would take bread and cheese with you. What is there to prepare? Surely your housekeeper will have bread and cheese on hand?'

Sir Henry laughed again. 'What my father says, Miss Morland, does not always quite align with his expectations. He likes a good dinner, especially when he has ridden two hours to get it. And my housekeeper would be appalled at my not giving her notice that he was arriving for dinner. Indeed, she will hardly forgive me for the mere half day's notice that I am hurrying home for.'

Catherine looked from him to his sister in confusion. But Sir Henry was bowing and saying that he looked forward to seeing them the next day. And then he was gone.

SUDDEN FURY



Henry heard the sound of the horses and went to meet his guests. He was pleased to see that his father was in a good mood; that boded well for the day ahead. Eleanor was also doing her utmost to be cheerful, though he knew she was unhappy. He knew all about Vallentyne, and he was doing all he could to find out word of him, but so far he had heard nothing. And then came Miss Morland, looking as young and fresh as the springtime morning as she walked towards him. Even her old-fashioned cloak could not dim her pretty features. She spied the puppy at his heels and cried out in pleasure, rushing to greet it.

Miss Morland seemed very pleased at all she saw of the house. She admired the size of the chambers and the sunny aspect of the parlour.

‘This home is only lacking one thing, Miss Morland,’ said Henry’s father as they looked about the house, ‘It lacks the fair hand of a mistress, does it not?’ Miss Morland only blushed and hid her face in the puppy’s fur.

Dinner likewise went smoothly. Only Henry knew what frantic bustle and mopping of brows and agonies his housekeeper and cook had endured to supply a dinner fit for Lord Tilney. Henry was also aware that his two female servants could not resist peeping through the door into the hall that they might see the young lady in whose honour this dinner had been held. No young lady, excepting his sister, had ever come to dine at the house

before. No doubt there was much speculation as to this potential new mistress.

‘SHE DON’T LOOK FANCY,’ said Sir Henry’s cook. ‘She’s pretty enough, but not what I would call a beauty.’

‘She must be richer than she looks,’ said the housekeeper, ‘or the master wouldn’t be allowed to wed her.’

‘Perhaps she’s got an inheritance to come or something,’ said the cook. ‘But I wouldn’t say she’s as well dressed as Lady Tilney, would you?’

‘Not a bit of lace or a jewel on her,’ agreed the housekeeper. ‘Still, she looks good-natured enough. So long as we don’t have a shrewish miss taking over and turning the house upside down I’ll be contented.’

‘The master seems to like her,’ said the cook. ‘He’s very attentive.’

‘Hard to tell,’ replied the housekeeper. ‘He’s manners enough for any lady. They say he’s quite a charmer at Lord Stormont’s summer ball.’

‘EXCELLENT VENISON, HENRY,’ declared his father, as he put down his knife.

‘It’s the last of the red hind, sir,’ said Henry.

‘Ah, that was a good day’s hunting. What think you of Henry’s table, Miss Morland? No doubt you think it simple, compared to what you are used to with Lord and Lady Allen, but you must forgive Henry for his bachelor ways. Yet another domain where the improving hand of a mistress is wanted.’

Miss Morland declared it a sumptuous table. Lord and Lady Allen always ate lightly at their noontime meal; they never had half so many dishes. Lord Tilney was most gratified to hear this. He suggested a walk about the grounds after dinner and pointed out to Miss Morland that there

was need for a mistress to design an ornamental walk or two, for the gardens were merely practical at present, and there were plans to improve the stables, so Miss Morland was not to be dismayed in thinking that there was no room for a gentle palfrey at this time.

After their walk they returned to the house for more refreshment, and then it was time for the ride back to the castle.

‘I go into Kingston tomorrow,’ Lord Tilney told Henry in parting. ‘Some business has come up. Call on your sister and Miss Morland as often as you can. I shall be gone a week.’

‘Yes, sir. I shall be sure to attend to everything in your absence.’

Miss Morland seemed very sorry to part with the puppy, and begged that Henry would bring him when he came to the castle. Henry laughed and said puppies did not travel well on horseback, but he hoped Miss Morland would be able to visit again soon to see the pup’s progress. She smiled in return at this suggestion, and waved prettily as she rode away.



EVEN ELEANOR’S spirits rose when her father left for town and her brother Henry arrived. There seemed to be a new lightness to the very air about them, now it was just the three of them. They laughed and talked and walked together. They rode out and came back with hearty appetites, rejoicing in the simplicity of a modest table where they could eat with pleasure and not with oppression. They sat before the fire in the evening and Henry read to them. The days were truly among the most pleasant that Eleanor could recall.

But she knew they could not last. They were as a golden interim. Henry had to return to his duties on his estate when five happy days had passed. There would be just one day when Eleanor and Miss Morland would be alone, and then her father was to return.

IT WAS the last night before the return of Lord Tilney; Eleanor had changed into her nightgown and was about to climb into bed when she heard the noise of banging at the door to the castle entrance. Whoever could it be at such an hour? But of course, it would be Frederick. He was due any day, and it was not unlike him to return at whatever hour suited him. She felt sorry for the kitchen staff, who would certainly be roused from their beds to serve beer and food to Frederick and his men. She wrapped a cloak about her and wrapped a cloth over her loosened hair, that she might greet Frederick briefly.

But as she descended the stairs from the first floor to the hall, it was not Frederick's voice she heard shouting out to the butler, but her father's.

She hurried down, wondering what could be the cause of his arrival at so late an hour. 'Sir!' she called as she crossed the hall. 'Are you well? We did not expect you till tomorrow.'

'Where is she?' demanded her father.

'Sir?'

'Don't pull that face at me – where is she?'

'Dorothy?' Eleanor could not think whom he meant.

'That impostor! That deceiver! That lying, scheming, wanton...where is she?'

Eleanor gasped in shock. She had not seen her father so angry since the day Frederick had told him about her and Vallentyne. 'Surely, sir, you do not refer to Miss Mor—'

'Whom else would I be referring to?' He was stomping furiously about the hall. The butler hurried in with a jug of wine and a goblet, and a sleepy looking boy came in with an armful of logs to stir up the fire that had been banked for the night. 'I want her out of my home this instant!' shouted Lord Tilney.

Eleanor could only stare at her father. Was he drunk? Was he mad? ‘I do not understand, sir. You surely cannot mean to throw Miss Morland out into the night? What is the meaning of this, sir? What has happened?’

‘What has happened,’ snarled Lord Tilney, ‘is that I have been made a fool of by that wench! She has come into my home under false pretences! I want her gone!’ He snatched up a cup of wine and downed it. The action seemed to calm him a little, for he stared into the emptied cup for some moments and then said in a slightly quieter tone, ‘She may leave in the morning. I want a horse saddled at first light, and her gone. I do not want to see her beguiling, trickster face – I want her gone before I come down for breakfast, do you hear?’

Eleanor was holding fast to the back of a chair for support. ‘But, sir, I do not understand at all,’ she said plaintively. ‘What possible reason can I give to tell her such a thing?’

‘Tell her what you like. Tell her I know her for what she really is – I have learnt it while I was in town, and I came back the moment I did so.’

‘Heard what, sir?’ Eleanor knew that every word she said put her in danger of his anger being directed towards her, but she had to know – it was all too dreadful – to have to tell Miss Morland that she was to be ejected immediately and not be able to even give a cause was shocking and disgraceful.

‘Never you mind!’ shouted her father. ‘I know what she is, and I want her out of my home at first light! And you may pack your trunk also, for after breakfast we will be leaving for Scrymgour Castle. I’d have had you married off by now if I hadn’t needed you here to keep that upstart, that pretender, that penniless, grasping wench company!’

Eleanor finally glimpsed some meaning in her father’s words. The word ‘penniless’ told her what she needed to know. Miss Morland’s crime, she was certain, rested on her father learning something about Miss Morland’s wealth, or lack of it. He would not have brought her here to be courted as a

wife for Henry if he had not thought her very wealthy, but now he had learnt that she was not. How all such misunderstandings had come about she could not guess, but she knew there was no use in trying to speak to her father in his present temper.

‘What are you standing there for like a moon-faced loon?’ shouted her father. ‘Get out of my sight – and be sure that she is gone as I have ordered! Get away with you – get gone!’

Eleanor turned and fled.

She stood outside Miss Morland’s chamber, wringing her hands and wondering how she was to tell the poor girl her fate. What could she say? It was so dreadful – it was as dreadful as the day she had watched Alice and Vallentyne leaving her.

Suddenly the door opened, and Miss Morland looked out in surprise. ‘Lady Eleanor, I thought I heard a sound at my door. But you look wretched, are you unwell?’

‘No, but yes, I am wretched! Oh, dear Miss Morland, how shall I tell you?’

THE DEED WAS DONE. Miss Morland had been told she must be ready to leave at first light. Eleanor had told her it was because her father had planned a visit to Lord Scrymgour’s castle next morning.

‘But if your father has suddenly recollected an arranged visit then it must be so,’ said Miss Morland quietly. ‘Do not be grieved on my behalf, Lady Eleanor. It is very sudden, to be sure, but if your father can spare a manservant to escort me home then all will be well. It will not signify that my family are not expecting me.’

‘Oh, Miss Morland,’ wept Eleanor. ‘You are not to have the attention of a manservant. You are to be taken to the nearest town and from there you are to make your own way home.’

‘Oh,’ said Miss Morland, growing as pale as Eleanor. ‘Well. Then I shall manage, I am sure. Please don’t weep, Lady Eleanor, it cannot be helped. If it is your father’s wish, then there is nothing either of us can do. All will be well, I am sure.’

‘Oh, Miss Morland – Catherine – you are too good and kind! You have every right to rail against me and my father – this is shameful treatment – dreadful! At least let me assist you in packing.’ Eleanor moved towards the wardrobe.

‘No, indeed, Lady Eleanor, I have so little with me that it will take no time at all to pack.’

Eleanor looked into the near empty wardrobe. ‘This used to be in my own chamber,’ she said. She stared up at the top shelf as though she were looking for something.

THE DREADFUL HOUR arrived shortly after dawn. Lady Eleanor looked as pale and miserable as Miss Morland as she embraced her friend goodbye.

‘Please send word that you are safe when you reach home,’ begged Eleanor. ‘Send it to Scrymgour Castle, for I do not believe I shall be returning to Tilney Castle again. Have you enough coin for the journey?’

Miss Morland looked surprised as though she had not considered any such thing. ‘Why, I have a few coppers,’ she said, looking at her chest of belongings.

‘Please take this,’ said Lady Eleanor, pressing a purse into her hands. ‘No, do not refuse, I beg you. Good bye, Miss Morland. Catherine.’

‘Good bye, Eleanor. My kindest regards to your brother. To Henry.’

The small trunk was strapped onto the saddle behind the groom, Catherine’s horse was brought to the mounting block, and then she rode away into the early morning mist.

REPINING SPIRIT



Catherine did not know how she managed to retain some semblance of composure as she said farewell to Lady Eleanor. But as soon as the borrowed horse took her away from the pale figure, standing forlornly at the castle entrance, Catherine broke down and wept.

She was frightened at how she would manage to secure her journey home. She had never felt so far away from home in her life. She had never felt so alone.

The groom from Tilney Castle had pity on her, and disobeyed his master's orders to set the girl down and leave her. He had two daughters of his own, and he would not leave until he had secured a safe passage for her back to the town nearest her home. It would be a slow, uncomfortable journey by cart and mule, but it was with a pair of honest merchants that were known to him. He saw them paid, and paid them a little extra himself for the promise of the good care of their passenger. He saw the poor, teary-eyed girl settled into the back of the cart, with her trunk secured, and only then did he return to the castle to ready the horses for the long ride to Scrymgour Castle.

CATHERINE ALTERNATED between weeping and dozing on the long journey. She wondered what her family would make of her sudden appearance. What should she tell her mother and father? She had no explanation to give, for she had no knowledge of why she had been treated as she had. Less than a week ago she had been certain Lord Tilney was making strong and pointed hints at her being betrothed to Sir Henry, she had believed it was so. But now, to be thrust out of the castle, without ceremony, without civility – what could be the cause? Had Lord Tilney suffered some bout of madness? Had he met a young lady in town that he would prefer as a wife for Sir Henry? Had he found out about her foolish notions of him and his late wife? – But surely not, for Sir Henry was the only other person in the world who knew her shame?

Catherine's dread of the humiliation of returning home in such a strange manner was entirely swallowed up by the warmth and affection of her family's greeting. She wept over them all, kissed every cheek, hugged every sibling and parent and was so very glad to be home. She told her tale as best she could, and the general agreement of all was that Lord Tilney must be a little addled, and was surely a very strange man indeed!



CATHERINE DID NOT UNDERSTAND what was wrong with her. Her mother frequently asked, but Catherine could give no answer. 'I hope you are not grown too particular after staying away so long in fine houses, Catherine, my girl?' said her mother at least once a day. 'For it seems as though nothing is quite good enough for you here anymore.'

'No indeed, Mama,' said Catherine. 'I am very glad to be home, indeed I am. I would not change our cottage for all the castles in the kingdom.' But even as she said the words a picture of a solid, stone house rose up in her

mind. A house with an open door, and in the doorway stood a smiling young man with a puppy at his heels...

‘I do hope this loss of appetite isn’t due to you being spoilt with fancy food these past months, my girl?’ her mother asked her at least one mealtime of every day.

‘No indeed, Mama. There is nothing like the butter from our own cows and eggs from our own hens. I would not wish for any other table in the world.’ But even as she said the words she saw a modest table with four chairs set about it in a comfortable hall with a pleasant aspect...

‘Catherine Morland, I’ve asked the same question twice over, and you’ve not answered me. I hope this gazing away out the window in a dream is not due to you thinking yourself away in some ballroom or fine chamber?’

‘Sorry, Mama. I was not thinking of ballrooms or fine chambers. Indeed I was not.’ And she was not. She was thinking of gentle walks on the arm of a certain gentleman, and pleasant evenings beside the fire listening to a certain gentleman reading...

‘I don’t know what’s wrong with our Catherine,’ Mistress Morland complained to her husband at least once every day since their daughter’s return. ‘She went away a reasonably sensible girl, not overly clever, and too fond of foolish stories for her own good, but she’s come back all moon-faced and listless and it seems nothing pleases her anymore. Whatever can be the matter with her?’

Her husband, who was more romantically minded than his practical wife, suggested their daughter might be repining for love, but he was pooh-poohed by his prosaic lady for such an idea.



CATHERINE SAT GAZING out of the window at the springtime afternoon. 'Day dreaming again, my girl?' came her mother's voice. 'Make yourself useful and go and lend a hand in the dairy.'

'Yes, Mama.' Catherine dragged herself from the window seat, wondering for the countless time since her return why she felt so weary. A rapping sounded at the front door on the other side of the house; the heavy footsteps of the maid were heard coming out of the kitchen and stomping down the hall to answer it. Catherine heard the lilt of a stranger's voice speaking, and she gasped aloud.

'What's the matter?' said Anne who was sat playing at straw dolls with little Harriet. 'You've gone white, Cathy. Now you've gone red! Now you're shaking!'

'A gentleman to see you, Miss Catherine,' said the maid.

'Miss Morland,' said the gentleman, stepping into the room and giving a very polite bow. 'I hope my coming does not displease you, but I could not rest until I had seen you again.'

'Oh, Sir Henry!' gasped Catherine when she could speak. She laughed a little, then seemed to stifle back a sob. 'Oh, it does not displease me to see you – not at all!'

MISTRESS MORLAND WAS practical enough to know that when a young, well-mannered bachelor travelled three day's journey to see her eldest daughter that it would be sensible to send the two young people in question somewhere where they could have a short time of private conversation. So after she had shown all due hospitality in the way of cold chicken and some of the blackberry wine kept for special occasions, she suggested the young couple walk down the lane and call upon Lord and Lady Allen, who would certainly be delighted to see an old acquaintance such as Sir Henry.

Mistress Morland realised in that moment that her husband may well have been more astute than she had given him credit for on this occasion, for the sudden enlivening of her daughter's countenance, and the surge of colour into her formerly wan cheeks, and the glow of pleasure in her eyes that turned her from almost plain into very pretty, where an hour previously she had been dull and listless, confirmed Master Morland's diagnosis of their daughter being lovelorn.

Indeed, such a diagnosis was completely confirmed when the young couple returned shortly before supper to announce that they had hopes of betrothing themselves to one another, if Master Morland would give his consent.

Master Morland was very pleased to conclude his daughter's happiness, but the practical Mistress Morland enquired a little more closely, and upon discerning that the young man before her had not yet acquired the consent of his own father, a check was made upon the betrothal being positively made. Lord Tilney must approve the marriage before they would let their daughter be carried away a second time into the vicinity of Tilney Castle.

This was felt as a blow to Catherine, but she had too much respect and affection for her parents to disagree, and Sir Henry understood their convictions and declared them right and proper. And so the young lovers were parted with some tears on her side, and many tender words on his, and as numerous discreet embraces as was possible in a cottage housing so plenteous a family.

CATHERINE NOW UNDERSTOOD ALL the strangeness of Lord Tilney's behaviour. He had been deceived by none other than Master John Thorpe, who, thinking himself as good as betrothed to Catherine had boasted of his conquest to Lord Tilney, declaring that he had won a grand prize, for Miss Morland was the heir of Lord and Lady Allen, they having no children of

their own. Lord Tilney hearing that Catherine was an heiress, and perceiving the acquaintance between her and his son and daughter, determined that he would snatch such a desirable match from under Master Thorpe's nose and whisk her away to Tilney Castle to foster and nurture a marital partnership with his own son.

When Lord Tilney met Master Thorpe a second time during his recent journey into town, the rejected, embittered Master Thorpe declared that he was well rid of Miss Morland, who not only was no heiress after all, but was the daughter of a lowly, impoverished family unfit for any marriage beyond that of a farmer or blacksmith or the like!

Lord Tilney was furious upon hearing that he had been nestling a common duckling, and no noble young swan beneath the wing of his castle walls – thus he had rushed back to cast out the unfortunate damsel and had forbidden his son to ever think of Miss Morland again!

‘But you did not heed him?’ Catherine had said, looking at Henry with a mixture of awe and adoration. ‘How was it you were not afraid? I should be very afraid of your father in a temper.’

‘There are feelings stronger than fear in such a situation,’ said Henry. ‘Feelings of outrage against such unjust behaviour. Feelings of honour towards a young lady who had been encouraged to think of marriage. Feelings of...love.’

Catherine had felt as though all the world was glowing golden and singing in harmony to hear that one word from the only man in all the world she desired to hear it from.

Henry had had to leave far too soon. But he'd left with promises that he would do all he could to win his father's favour back and to gain his consent on their marriage.

A HERO



‘Tomorrow’s ball is in your honour,’ Lord Tilney told his daughter.
‘Scrymgour will announce your betrothal there.’

‘I have not agreed to any betrothal,’ said Lady Eleanor in a half-choked voice.

‘Don’t attempt to countermand me,’ growled her father. ‘Henry has cast himself at the devil – but you’ll do as you’re told!’

Lady Eleanor felt as though she were moving in a bad dream. All kinds of mad thoughts came to her mind – thoughts of running away – but where to? Would Henry give her shelter? Of course he would, but he would not be able to stop their father from dragging her away. Perhaps she could travel northwards – seek for word of Vallentyne – was he still alive? But how would she, a lone woman be able to safely travel anywhere? She felt utterly trapped.

The day was dimming towards evening. The grand feast in the hall would soon begin, and afterwards there would be the ball.

She stood at the window of her guest chamber watching the arrival of the guests, their horses clattering across the stone bridge to the castle. There was a knock at the door and the maid assigned to her by Lord Scrymgour came in to help her dress.

ONE OF THE late arrivals that evening was Frederick. Lord Tilney had demanded his attendance at Scrymgour Castle, and he took his seat near the head of the banquet table, for the Tilney family held the seats of honour that night.

‘How are you, Frederick?’ Eleanor politely enquired. ‘I have not seen nor heard of you since we left you in town.’ She was wondering if Frederick would have any announcement to make regarding a betrothal to a Miss Thorpe.

‘I’m as I always am,’ said Frederick, attacking the platter of roast fowl with as much relish as his father was showing in spearing up a dish of lampreys. ‘But I’ve some news that you will find interesting,’ he continued. ‘The whole city was talking of it as I was leaving.’

‘Oh,’ said Lord Tilney. ‘Court gossip?’

‘News of a certain former knight of yours,’ said Frederick.

Eleanor put down her goblet, fearing she would spill its contents, for she had a sudden presentiment at Frederick’s words.

‘In fact,’ said Frederick, ‘I not only heard a good deal of talk of him, I saw him briefly myself as I was leaving. He was most interested to hear where I was going to. He was most interested to hear that *you* would be here, sister.’

‘What are you talking about, Frederick?’ said Lord Tilney. ‘Who are you speaking of?’

‘I’m speaking of the new dragon slayer.’

‘Dragon slayer?’

‘Come back in glory from the far north, having slain that red serpent that’s been plaguing the kingdom for years.’

‘What?’ said Lord Tilney. ‘Someone has killed it? Has won all that gold?’

‘Fifty gold sovereigns from every nobleman in the kingdom,’ said Frederick. ‘And the king has made him an earl and given him an estate of

ten thousand acres.'

'Has he, by the swords of Albany!' said Lord Tilney. 'That will make him one of the richest men in all the kingdoms! You should have tried your own hand at killing that beast! Fifty gold sovereigns from every noble and ten thousand acres!'

'Who, Frederick?' said Eleanor, unable to keep her voice from quivering.

Frederick smiled his lazy grin. 'Why, dear sister, who do you think? The man is none other than—'

Frederick did not finish, for there was a bustle in the entrance to the hall. The butler was declaring loudly that no one who was not invited could enter, but he was declaring in vain, for the uninvited visitor was striding into the hall, his spurs clattering on the stone floor and his tall, handsome appearance exciting much attention from the banqueting guests.

'Who is it?' was the question rippling through the hall.

Lord Tilney put down his knife and stood up with a look of anger on his face. 'What brings you into my sight?' he called out to the approaching man.

Frederick likewise got to his feet. 'Why, Father, here is the very man I was telling you of – here he is – the new dragon slayer!'

There was an eruption of exclamations about the hall – 'The dragon slayer! Is it really him!'

The dragon slayer stood before Lord Tilney and bowed respectfully. 'My lord. I come to ask you for the hand of your daughter. I can offer her a large estate, the title of countess, and much wealth for the comfort and security of herself and her family. But I know her soul too well to think I can please her with mere material gain, and so I offer to her that which cannot be measured in gold – I offer my heart and the promise that she will ever be beloved.'

LADY ELEANOR of Tilney Castle was married to Lord Vallentyne, the Earl of Rossmornay in the fullness of springtime.

The wealth that Lord Vallentyne brought to the family eased Lord Tilney's pain at having to pay Lord Scrymgour recompense for the broken betrothal contract. Indeed, Lord Tilney was so entirely gratified in seeing his daughter wed to one of the wealthiest men in the known kingdoms, and his eldest son soon after betrothed to the daughter of Lord Caldronhed, that he permitted his daughter to have some influence over him for the first time in her life.

As Countess of Rossmornay, Lady Eleanor commanded a good deal of respect from her father, which she had not previously enjoyed. She was glad to use such influence to persuade him to reconcile with his youngest son and to give his consent to what he described as Henry's foolish marriage with that Morland girl.

Lord Tilney was further softened upon learning that the Morland girl was not quite as poor and undeserving as he had been led to believe. And as it was she who was the bearer of his first grandson she grew in his estimation at precisely the same rate as his young name-bearer grew in height.

And so the name of Tilney continued on, entwined in future stories of romance and adventure, as well as more domestic tales, for ever after.

The End

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